

**Cultural Narratives And Alternative Topographies In The Works Of
Etel Adnan, Ingeborg Bachmann And Sevim Burak**

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Declaration of Authorship

IGizem Okulu..... hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

The thesis explores the use of alternative topographies and cultural narratives in the works of Etel Adnan, Ingeborg Bachmann and Sevim Burak. The term ‘alternative topography’ suggests that these writers do not simply describe existing topographies: rather, they create imaginative spaces, invented countries, which provide spaces from which to challenge the violence present within national boundaries and zones of conflict. ‘Cultural narrative’ suggests the narrative used to define a particular national or ethnic group. While this term has provided useful in reclaiming the identities of marginalized and oppressed groups, it has its limitations. These writers were very aware of the narratives used to describe situations of national and ethnic conflict, witnessing political crises in Lebanon, Turkey, Austria, Germany and America. However, they refuse to be tied to a single cultural narrative, instead crossing borders, geographies, genres and time frames to create hybrid narratives that resist cultural pigeonholing and the violence it can create. The second part of the thesis draws on these precedents to explore, through my own poetry, resistance to linguistic and cultural pigeonholing through the experimental use of narrative and performative identity.

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INTRODUCTION

My thesis draws on the use of cultural narratives and alternative topographies in the works of Etel Adnan, Ingeborg Bachmann and Sevim Burak. These three writers, coming from very different cultural backgrounds but living around the same period in time – Adnan being the oldest (born in 1925), Bachmann the year after (1926) and Burak in 1931 - have a similarity in expressing themselves by using narrative and topography in their work. Their writing is often political, though not always directly, due to the particular political situations of their surroundings in Lebanon and America (Adnan), Turkey and England (Burak), and Austria, America and Germany (Bachmann). They are witnesses of the important political changes and catastrophes of their eras. As Ingeborg Bachmann writes: ‘We shall be witnesses.’¹ Bachmann witnessed the rise and aftermath of fascism, Adnan the Lebanese Civil War, Burak the birth of the new Turkish republic.

This is where the term topography comes in. Topography means the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area. My term ‘alternative topography’ suggests, however, that these writers do not simply describe existing topographies: rather, they create imaginative spaces, invented countries, which provide spaces from which to challenge the violence present within national boundaries and zones of conflict such as the Lebanese Civil War. I will focus on the way these three writers use poetic personae, which sometimes could be interpreted as a

¹ Ingeborg Bachmann, *In the Storm of Roses: Selected Poems by Ingeborg Bachmann*, trans. by Mark Anderson (Princeton, New Jersey: Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation, Princeton University Press, 1986), p.123.

biographical reference point and sometimes an invented character as a feature of the imaginative spaces in their work.

‘Cultural narrative’ suggests the narrative used to define a particular national or ethnic group. While this term has proved useful in reclaiming the identities of marginalized and oppressed groups, it has its limitations.² It can narrow the reader’s perspective by offering a single, fixed point of view. It is perhaps significant that both Etel Adnan and Ingeborg Bachmann worked in news-related jobs: Bachmann at the *Allied* radio station and Adnan as a cultural editor for *Al-Safa*, a French language newspaper from Beirut. They were therefore very aware of the narratives used to describe situations of national and ethnic conflict. However, all three writers refused to be tied to a single narrative, instead crossing borders, geographies, genres and time frames to create hybrid narratives that resist cultural pigeonholing and the violence it can create.

Etel Adnan is an Arab-American poet and painter, who writes between languages. She lives in both France and California, while also frequently visiting her birthplace in Lebanon, Beirut. Having written in French previously, Adnan has been writing in English for decades and English has become her poetic language.

Ingeborg Bachmann was an Austrian-born German-language poet, and as Mark Anderson, one of Bachmann’s English-language translators, writes: ‘Since Ingeborg Bachmann’s first collection of poetry appeared in 1953, she has been recognized as

² ‘On the one hand, some narratives celebrate the normative structure of culture; they instruct, chasten, and lend rhetorical weight to norms and conventions. (...) Other narratives, however, have the purpose not of distributing canon, but of accounting for exception, novelty, and anomaly.’ Dennis Saleebey, ‘Culture, Theory, and Narrative: The Intersection of Meanings in Practice’, *Social Work*, 39.4, (1994), 351-359 (p. 353).

one of the most original poets writing in German.’³ Bachmann’s thematic focus on issues to do with war, language, and identity within the places where she geographically resided is one of the most significant elements of her work. She lived and wrote in between Austria, Germany and Italy and Zurich, and wrote about her experience in living in and across all these places. For example, we might think of her essay “What I Saw And Heard In Rome” (“*Was ich in Rom sah und hört*”) written in 1955, and her short story about Berlin “A Place for Coincidences” (“*Ein Ort für Zufälle*”) written in 1964. I will talk about both of these in more detail in my chapter on Bachmann. I will also discuss the series of lectures Bachmann gave in Frankfurt in 1959, called “Frankfurt Lectures”, in which she talks in depth about various subjects such as language, ethics, the writing of the ‘I’ in relation to history, utopic writing and forgotten names.⁴ Most importantly, I will discuss her poetry, and its creation of alternative topographies, in poems such as ‘Bohemia Lies By The Sea’, written in 1964.

Sevim Burak was a Turkish writer who lived and wrote in between Turkey, England and Nigeria. Her writing has the characteristics of Turkish modernism, which was heavily influenced by French modernism from the start. However, Burak’s writing is singularly experimental and at times satirical about the society of the newly developed Turkish Republic. She is also conscious of her Jewish heritage, coming

³ Ingeborg Bachmann, *In the Storm of Roses: Selected Poems by Ingeborg Bachmann*, trans. by Mark Anderson (Princeton, New Jersey: Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation, Princeton University Press, 1986), back cover.

⁴ Irmela von der Lühe and Maureen T. Kraus, “I without Guarantees”, Ingeborg Bachmann’s Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics’, *New German Critique*, no.27, (1982), pp.31-55.

from her mother, Anne-Marie Mandil. This particularly inspired her first book of short stories, *Yanık Saraylar (Burnt Palaces)*, published in 1965.⁵

These three women, who resist cultural pigeonholing and national and linguistic barriers, work in a mixed-genre of prose, plays and poems. They write about exile, displacement, and ethnic minority identity in their particular socio-political environments. All three have fallen victim to ‘misreception’. Karen R. Achberger writes on Ingeborg Bachmann: ‘As her works fell victim to the very forces they were launched against, namely the conservative establishment of Restoration Germany, Bachmann became a classic case of “misreception”, of conflict between authorial intention and dominant modes of reception.’⁶ Likewise, I discuss the misogynist reception of Sevim Burak within a Turkish literary context in the chapter focusing on her work. These three writers are and have been very influential on my writing over the years, and in my thesis I will bring them together in their differences and their similarities to each other and to my own writing.

The structure and conception of my thesis is influenced by poet Frances Kruk’s practice-based Ph.D., which analyses three writers from different contexts and language-cultures – Raul Zurita, Danielle Collobert and Maggie O’Sullivan – through the lens of her own poetry.⁷ In doing so, I seek to challenge readings of poetry that are tied to national narratives. While acknowledging the difficulties and dangers of cross-

⁵ Sevim Burak, *Yanık Saraylar*, 1 edn (İstanbul: Türkiye Basımevi, 1965).

⁶ Karen Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann* (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 1995), p.1.

⁷ Frances Kruk is a Polish-Canadian poet, who studied for a PhD at Royal Holloway. Her thesis examined violence and identity in the poetry of Raul Zurita, Maggie O’Sullivan, and Daniel Collobert. Frances Kruk, ‘Violence and Identity in the Poetry of Danielle Collobert, Maggie O’Sullivan and Raúl Zurita’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012).

cultural generalization, and the intricacies of reading work in translation, I believe that it is important to make such connections in order to challenge parochial and nationalist narratives and, without smoothing over or ignoring differences, to suggest alternative, internationalist possibilities. In the rest of the introduction, I will briefly introduce the three writers, Bachmann, Adnan and Burak, and compare their work. This next part of the Introduction is divided into three sections: 'Between Languages And the Voices Of The Dead', which addresses their conceptions of linguistic difference and poetic language; 'Real and Imagined Spaces', which reflects on their creation of alternative topographies through poetic language; and 'Working with History', which examines their dialogue with the politics of their time, such as the aftermath of Nazism in 1950s and 1960s Germany and Austria (Bachmann), the Lebanese Civil War (Adnan) and the problems of Jewish identity in Turkey and the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Turkish Republic (Burak). In addition, all three writers develop critiques of American culture, connecting it to commercialism and imperialism, and I will also address this aspect of their work. While they engage with history and place, I will also show how each writer resists a single cultural narrative or national topography, instead creating imaginary spaces which challenge singular categories.

Between Languages And The Voices Of The Dead

'If we had the words, if we had the language, we would not need the weapons.'

(Ingeborg Bachmann)⁸

⁸ Quoted in Christa Bürger, "'I and We': Ingeborg Bachmann's Emergence from Aesthetic Modernism', *New German Critique*, no.47, (1989), pp.3-28.

Etel Adnan's first two books, *Sitt Marie Rose* (The Post Apollo Press, 1982) and *The Arab Apocalypse* (The Post Apollo Press, 1989 (*L'Apocalypse Arabe*, 1980)) were written originally in French. Adnan translated *The Arab Apocalypse* into English herself and therefore counts this English translation as an original work. In *The Arab Apocalypse*, which I discuss in detail in my chapter on Adnan, Adnan uses surreal imagery, showing the influences of French surrealism in particular. In her poetry, Adnan also invokes earlier avant-garde French poets: Baudelaire ('Baudelaire mercenary sun alphabet') and Rimbaud ('MAO or the new Rimbaud').⁹ As she indicates, along with Verlaine, these were part of her education at the French school she attended.¹⁰ However, with her references to the "sun", her repetitions and surrealistic imagery, Adnan particularly puts her poetry in dialogue with that of the French surrealist poet Aimé Césaire. The figure of the sun is an important element in Césaire's well-known book *Return To My Native Land* (*Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*) in lines like: 'an old wretchedness decomposing in silence beneath the sun (...) naked water sweeps away the stains ripened by the sun'.¹¹ Like Césaire, Adnan is also a witness to a political catastrophe, which she is critiquing. Here he was responding to the colonial condition of his native land. For Césaire, the sun was both masculine (because of the French gender of the word), and associated with the colonizer, infected with colonialism and spreading disease ('surveyed day and night by a cursed venereal sun').¹² The significance of this poem in relation to Adnan's work is that it is an epic poem, though as Hedy Kalikoff writes: 'To refer to it as a "long poem" seems somewhat to slight its powers. Yet, we need to foreground its unwieldiness, since the

⁹ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.74.

¹⁰ 'In the French school, Gabriel Bounoure taught us Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine.' Lynne Tillman, 'Etel Adnan - Children of the sun', *Bidoun*, 18 (2009).

¹¹ Aimé Césaire, *Return to my Native Land*, trans. by John Berger and Anna Bostock, 2 edn (Brooklyn, New York: Archipelago Books, 2014), p.10.

¹² See Hedy Kalikoff, "Gender, Genre and Geography in Aimé Césaire's 'Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal.'" *Callaloo*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1995, pp.492–505.

poem's difficult form is one of the ways in which it bespeaks an unresolved historical struggle.¹³ Adnan's focus on the sun is also to do with the environmental and political factors she grew up with, contrasted to the racist attitudes of the French colonial class, which is also true for Césaire and a striking difference between Paris and Martinique, the homeland he returns to:

As a child, I had a strong sense of the presence of the sun. In the summer, the sun is very vivid in Beirut... In my twenties, I heard the French say that Arabs were the children of the sun, *les enfants du soleil*. It was said with disdain — Arabs were irresponsible, grown-up children. And I remember walking into the mountains of my village, never wearing a hat, being very aware it was hot, feeling surrounded by the sun like a thief by the police.¹⁴

Adnan's comparison of the sun to the police is interesting here, as it implies being constantly watched and suggests the presence of state power. Even the natural world seems to be involved in the political crisis. However, as Adnan continues talking about the sun, it emerges as a force of life: 'In nature, there is danger, too. Because the sun is dangerous. It can kill you, burn you. But the sun is also life.'¹⁵ For Adnan, Lebanon and her childhood experiences there carry a particular importance, and she frequently returns to these experiences in her books *In The Heart Of The Heart Of Another Country* (City Lights, 2005), *Of Cities And Women* (The Post Apollo Press, 1993) alongside *The Arab Apocalypse*. Because of her history, the inequality and violence she has witnessed, she attends particularly to the voices of the dead. For her, these are the voices of the Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Palestinians and many other

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Tillman, 'Etel Adnan – Children of the sun'.

¹⁵ Ibid.

ethnicities who have suffered because of various political conflicts. Thus she writes in *The Arab Apocalypse*: ‘a blue sun receding a Kurd killing an Armenian an Armenian killing a Palestinian’.¹⁶ Here we see a chain of killings done by different ethnicities; minorities contributing to each other’s suffering.

Ingeborg Bachmann was born in the small Austrian city of Klagenfurt, situated on the borders of Italy and Yugoslavia. This liminal position later becomes important for Bachmann, as she herself aims to write outside of borders and nationalities: ‘speak across borders, / even if borders pass through every word’.¹⁷ Karen R. Achberger writes about the critical reception of Bachmann’s work: ‘It was easier to praise the artistic quality of Bachmann’s verse, the musicality of her language, its “subtle differentiation of feeling” or knowledge of the “mysteries of the organically developed strophe,” than to appreciate its social relevance.’¹⁸ On the other hand, Bachmann’s social critique, and the troubled circumstances of her own life and death, also leads many people to overlook the variety of her writing: how musical, thoughtful and humorous it was, as well as socially conscious and always questioning.¹⁹

Bachmann’s second collection of poetry published in 1956, *Invocation Of The Great Bear (Anrufung des Groben Baren)*, combines themes such as death, resurrection,

¹⁶ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.20.

¹⁷ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken: The Collected Poems of Ingeborg Bachmann*, trans. by Peter Filkins (Brookline, MA: Zephyr Press, 2005), p.121.

¹⁸ The quotations are taken from Günter Blöcker’s review in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which the publishing house R. Piper quoted on the jacket of *Anrufung des Groben Baren*. Quoted in Karen R. Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*, p.15.

¹⁹ See, for example, the controversy over Elfriede Jelinek’s screenplay adaptation of Bachmann’s novel *Malina* for the 1990 film directed by Werner Schroeter, whose conclusion inserts heavy-handed parallels to the circumstances of Bachmann’s own death in a fire. See Kathleen L. Komar, ‘“Es war Mord”: The Murder of Ingeborg Bachmann at the Hands of an Alter Ego’, *Modern Austrian Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1994), pp.91-112

nature, and the feeling of being in-between. Bachmann writes in “Songs from an Island”, for example: ‘When you rise again, / when I rise again, / the hangman hangs on the gate, / the hammer sinks in the sea’.²⁰ Here, Bachmann’s persona, who has a poetic identity with Christ, addresses the reader, who will also “rise again”. This idea of resurrection exists alongside the suggested abolition of capital punishment (the hangman who is himself hung on the gate of the city). Bachmann’s lines recall Etel Adnan’s in *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations Of the Voyage*: ‘This night of death and resurrection/ ends with the rise of dawn’.²¹ Death and language were two of the topics Bachmann discussed in her prose and poetry. She wrote in the title story of her book, *The Thirtieth Year* in 1962: ‘No new world without a new language’.²² For Bachmann, existing philosophical language was insufficient to describe the political violence and inequality she was witnessing at the time. Fascinated by Wittgenstein’s statement “Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent”, Bachmann delivered a radio essay on Wittgenstein entitled ‘The Sayable and the Unsayable’, arguing that “there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest”. While, for Bachmann, these “things” are “mystical” and “unsayable”, poetry is a way that they can “make themselves manifest” in language. My work differs from Bachmann’s here, in that my concern is less with the “mystical” dimensions of the “unsayable” than with more material levels of linguistic meaning, such as those relating to current and historical political situations and to social questions. Nonetheless, while her emphasis is different to mine, Bachmann’s concerns are also clearly marked by the then-recent experience of enormous historical violence, suffering and trauma associated with the Nazi regime

²⁰ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.187.

²¹ Etel Adnan, *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations of the Voyage* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1990), p.88.

²² Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Thirtieth Year: Stories by Ingeborg Bachmann*, trans. by Michael Bullock (Teaneck, New Jersey: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc, 1995), p.50.

and with the wartime catastrophe overtaking Europe, as I explore in my reading of her poetry. A reading of the “unsayable” as solely mystical or metaphysical would thus be incomplete.

Bachmann’s Ph.D. dissertation on Martin Heidegger affirms her faith in art and poetry to expand the limits of language, expressing the “awareness of life” that philosophy is unable to capture. She concludes with lines from Baudelaire’s ‘*Le gouffre*’ (‘*The Abyss*’), which she cites as “linguistic evidence of the extreme possibility of expressing the ineffable”.²³ In relation to Baudelaire’s poem, one result of this sense of the inadequacy of language was a turning to the visual. In this, she again recalls Etel Adnan, who used drawings alongside poetry in her book *The Arab Apocalypse*, to create another medium for the possibility of expressing herself artistically.

For both Bachmann and Adnan, French literature was an important source of inspiration. As noted earlier, Turkish modernism was always open to European Modernism: well-known poets such as İlhan Berk were influenced by French symbolist poets (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Paul Valéry) and French surrealist poets like René Char. Burak herself was influenced by other modernist writers such as Beckett, Faulkner, Joyce and Kafka.²⁴ In her engagement with the limits of language, she used words from French, English and at times Ottoman Turkish dictionaries, as in the following Ottoman conjugation which appears in *Afrika Dansı*: ‘*Sévédgéguim/*

²³ See *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*, pp.59-60.

²⁴ Şima İmşir Parker, ‘Sevim Burak Critical Biography’. *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Second Series: Vol. 379, Turkish Novelists Since 1960* (Farmington Hills, Mich. : Gale, Cengage Learning, 2017). Online <https://www.academia.edu/30907344/DLB_379_Sevim_Burak_critical_biography> [accessed 25 June 2020].

Sévédjéksin/ Sévédjék/ Sévédjéguiz/ Sévédjéksénéz/ Sévédjéklér'.²⁵ Burak's experimenting with using different languages, her capitalization of words, and her use of poetic lineation in prose form, established her as a one-of-a-kind writer in the history of Turkish literature. Existing scholarship on Burak has been almost exclusively Turkish. However, there is some evidence of growing interest in her work beyond Turkey. A recent exhibition in 2004 at Yapı Kredi Kültür Merkezi in İstanbul on Sevim Burak featured her hand-written manuscripts and personal belongings, and there has been a bilingual book published on her work, both in English and Turkish.²⁶ An English translation of Burak's play, *His Master's Voice (Sahibinin Sesi)* was published in Dublin in May 2011: fifty copies of this book were printed for a symposium on her work at Trinity College, Dublin.²⁷ My thesis aims to contribute to this growing interest by placing Burak in dialogue with Adnan and Bachmann. My own creative work exhibits a similarly broad field of cultural influence. Both my critical and creative work also aim to challenge Eurocentric accounts of Modernism while acknowledging the problems of translation and cultural imperialism that are raised by using English translation as an imperfect but necessary means of access and frame.

Real And Imagined Spaces

'...Words became my landscape' (Etel Adnan)²⁸

²⁵ Sevim Burak, *Afrika Dansı*, 5 edn (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2018), p.66. Trans.: 'I will love/ You will love/ It will love/ We will love/ You will love (plural)/ They will love'.

²⁶ Nilüfer Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, ed. by Filiz Özdem, trans. by Mary Işin, Emine Mizyal, 2 edn (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2013).

²⁷ Sevim Burak, *His Master's Voice in Dublin* (İstanbul: Mass Printing House, 2011).

²⁸ Etel Adnan, *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations of the Voyage* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1990), p.67.

Etel Adnan talks about the importance of place in an interview with Lynne Tillman: ‘My relation to place is also a desire to know where I am.’²⁹ In Adnan’s book, *The Arab Apocalypse*, for example, place names are frequently invoked and frequently change: ‘a yellow sun yawns over Beirut and Paris is dying and New York is fainting. O unsewn Time!’³⁰ Beirut and Paris are two familiar cities for Adnan as she resides in both. In these lines, she shifts from Beirut to Paris and New York: the desire ‘to know where I am’ is met by this cosmopolitan gesture. Adnan writes in *Of Cities And Women (Letters To Fawwaz)*: ‘... I feel that I haven’t settled anywhere, really, that I’m rather living the world, all over, in newspapers, railway stations, cafes, airports... The books that I’m writing are houses that I build for myself.’³¹ Adnan’s self-exile, feeling that she has not adjusted to living in one place permanently, is similar to Bachmann’s looking for another place and another language throughout her writing.

Adnan, who is also a well-known visual artist, uses bright colours for her landscape paintings. She mentions colours very often in her poetry, most of the times in relation to describing a particular landscape: thus Mexico is evoked through ‘a purple sun over a planetary volcano’, while Beirut prompts the following, ‘A warring sun in Beirut thunderous April cool breeze on the ships / yellow sun on a pole an eye in the gun’s hole a dead from Palestine’.³² In her written work, different landscapes are united through such figures: ‘Sun DELAWARE BEIRUT HELL’.³³ As with her paintings, colour is also used in non-naturalistic ways to signal states of being. In her book *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations Of The Voyage* (The Post-Apollo Press,

²⁹ Tillman, ‘Etel Adnan – Children of the sun’.

³⁰ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.14.

³¹ Etel Adnan, *Of Cities & Women (Letters To Fawwaz)* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1993), p.111.

³² Etel Adnan, *To look at the sea is to become what one is - An Etel Adnan Reader*, ed. by Thom Donovan, Brandon Shimoda (Brooklyn, NY: Nightboat Books, 2014), pp.165-175.

³³ Ibid.

1990), for example, she writes: ‘...The sun appeared white and without its/ rays.’³⁴ Colours “appear” in Adnan’s poetry as a force of nature, but also, at times, as evidence of violence: ‘There is no wind/ Beirut is blue and grey/ this season’s first flowers/ are drops of blood’.³⁵ In this book, Adnan also includes drawings alongside poetry, just as she did in *The Arab Apocalypse*, but they are less frequent and only appear on the first page of each section. These drawings offer a visual reading of the text, a deliberate contrast to the rhythm of the verbal.³⁶ In this volume, Adnan invokes the French poets Lautréamont and Rimbaud, as well as the German poet Hölderlin, as she previously did Baudelaire and Rimbaud in *The Arab Apocalypse*: ‘O Lautréamont, come to my/ rescue! / Let’s carry the ocean *elsewhere*’.³⁷ Adnan summons the figure of Hölderlin later in *The Spring Flowers On*: ‘On a chapped and gaping wall/ an adolescent in Arabic wrote:/ “Is there life before death?”/ (Final text for Hölderlin)’.³⁸ In this way Adnan puts herself in dialogue with Lautréamont and Hölderlin, the voices of the dead European poets allowing her to create alternative poetic spaces where one can “carry the ocean *elsewhere*”.

Wen-Chin Ouyung writes on Adnan’s exilic poetry: ‘Like other narratives of exile, Adnan’s narratives are, perhaps by necessity, autobiographical: the experience of exile is so overwhelming that writing about it becomes the only resistance to the abyss created by the state of placelessness.’³⁹ While Ouyung suggests a useful context for Adnan’s work, which engages, for example, with her witnessing of the Lebanese

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*. p.65.

³⁶ ‘Mona Takieddine Amyuni, ‘Etel Adnan’s ‘THE ARAB APOCALYPSE’’, *Al Jadid*, 7.34, (2001).

³⁷ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.78.

³⁸ Etel Adnan, *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations of the Voyage* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1990), p.60.

³⁹ Lisa Suhair Majaj, Amal Amireh, *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002), p.76.

Civil War (in *The Arab Apocalypse*) or her travels abroad (in *Of Cities and Woman*), I ultimately disagree with Ouyung's reading of Adnan's poetry in relation to "the abyss created by the state of placelessness". Adnan herself many times said that she has never felt at home anywhere, but she also said that, to her, this placelessness is necessary for writing and making visual art, as she could then experience and manipulate her own space. Thus Adnan's poetry repeatedly refers to the places she inhabits or travels through by their geographical characteristics:

The world is smaller than the center
of your eye. Banners are floating
over San Francisco announcing Spring's
end. A young man came running down
from the top of Mount Rainier. We
received him with orange peels.

one day even the stars
became soldiers
Isis wept over the empty
sky.⁴⁰

Here, Adnan references the Egyptian god Isis, who is weeping "over the empty sky" in two different cities, Seattle (the nearest city to Mount Rainer) and San Francisco, which is one of the cities in which Adnan resides. The ancient deity unites two contemporary spaces, in response to the devastation of war, where 'even the stars became soldiers'. The poem's multiple spaces—its freedom to travel imaginatively—

⁴⁰ Etel Adnan, *The Indian Never Had a Horse and Other Poems* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1986), p.11.

register conditions of movement are frequently linked by the shadow of war. Living in different spaces and travelling frequently is an important poetic inspiration for Adnan's nomadic writing, as we can see through this poem. Her work cannot simply be understood as a work of exile restricted to one cultural narrative. Rather, it should be understood as an example of internationalism, reflecting the multiplicity of her family background – growing up in Turkey to a Syrian father and a Greek mother (who communicated in Turkish), and subsequently living between France, Lebanon and America – as well as her internationalist, anti-imperial politics.

Like Adnan, Bachmann also lived in many different countries and wrote while travelling, producing her own alternative poetic spaces. In her late essay about Berlin, 'A Place for Coincidences', for example, she presents a grotesque image of Berlin: 'In Berlin all people are now wrapped in greaseproof paper'. She continues: 'The women in the greaseproof paper arouse compassion, some of them are allowed to get out of the paper and sit in the grass with their greasy clothes. Then the patients are also allowed to land. We've got so many sick people here cried the night nurse and fetches the patients who are leaning over the balcony and are quite damp and trembling.'⁴¹ Bachmann wrote this essay, which also reads as a short story, when suffering from poor health during an extended stay in a hospital in Berlin. Aine McMurty writes, of the later writing of Bachmann: 'Despite the author's professional commitments and collaborations, spells of illness and crisis dogged her stay (in Rome). Twice admitted to Berlin's Martin Luther Hospital, Bachmann also left the

⁴¹ Martin Chalmers, *Beneath Black Stars: Contemporary Austrian Short Stories*, trans. by Agnes Rook (London, UK: Serpent's Tail, 2002), p.34.

city for clinic treatments in Zurich, St. Moritz and Baden-Baden.’⁴² Bachmann draws on this specific experience of Berlin to produce her own grotesque poetic space. Similarly, Sevim Burak suffered from heart trouble and came to London for heart surgery, an experience which influenced her play *Everest, My Lord*. While I do not wish to interpret Burak and Bachmann’s work through the framework of physical or mental illness – a frame often used to pathologize and sensationalize female writers – these medical experiences, along with the experience of war and conflict, and the imaginary spaces created in Modernist literatures, also contribute to their work’s alternative topography.

Bachmann’s poetic imagery creates her own imaginary landscapes. At times, she creates an abstract landscape, but suggests an epic scale. She writes in her poem “Settlement”: ‘I drew it from the earth, / I lifted it to the sky/ with all my might.’⁴³ Elsewhere, she engages with what is clearly an imaginary landscape. In “Bohemia Lies By The Sea”, Bachmann places herself in dialogue with Shakespeare’s play *The Winter’s Tale*: ‘If a word here borders on me, I’ll let it border. / If Bohemia still lies by the sea, I’ll believe in the sea again. / And believing in the sea, thus I can hope for land.’⁴⁴ Shakespeare’s Bohemia is famously an imaginary landscape, inventing a seacoast for a region that is in reality land-locked.⁴⁵

⁴² Áine McMurtry, *Crisis and Form in the Later Writing of Ingeborg Bachmann: An Aesthetic Examination of the Poetic Drafts of the 1960s* (Cambridge, UK: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2012), p. 89.

⁴³ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.139.

⁴⁴ See Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*, p.21.

⁴⁵ Emma Poltrack, ‘*The Winter’s Tale*’ and the problem of the Bohemia seacoast (2018) Online: <<https://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2018/03/30/bohemia-winters-tale-seacoast/>> [accessed 25 June 2020].

The main character in Sevim Burak's play, *Everest My Lord*, is a 'Turkic-speaking' English Lord, who is nostalgic about the old times. The play itself is located in both London and Istanbul, and this is done in a way that sometimes makes it difficult to differentiate one from the other: 'Everest My Lord: Water sellers everywhere... There's no peace in even Hyde Park, what am I going to do with water? (...) (*Raises his hands while looking at trees.*) CYPRESS TREES...' ⁴⁶ This reference to Cypress trees is challenging, as there are no Cypress trees in Hyde Park: they are not one of the types of local trees to be found in England, as opposed to Istanbul. Similarly, water sellers, who are selling water on the street, are still common in Turkey as the temperature rises, but not in England's cooler climate. However, while Hyde Park is here a kind of imaginary, composite landscape, situated between London and Turkey, or with Turkey superimposed upon London, Burak sometimes refers to Hyde Park as Hyde Park in London:

'Prime Minister: Unfortunately time passes. (*To the Ladies*) I'm in London for 20 years I've never happened to meet you beautiful ladies.

Everest My Lord (*putting himself forward*): Ladies live in our neighbourhood. (*Pointing out the big skyscrapers behind Hyde Park with his hands*)' ⁴⁷

Burak talks about *Everest My Lord*, being influenced by her trips to London, but she also emphasizes that it is, primarily, a work of language: '(...) It is my poem about building my work from its roots, with words and letters one by one. It is a work of

⁴⁶ Sevim Burak, *Everest My Lord – İşte Baş İşte Gövde İşte Kanatlar*, 4 edn (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2019), p.10.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

language.⁴⁸ Burak's "exchanging places with words", like her switching between London and Istanbul, creates her alternative topography as a place in language.

In her last work, her unfinished novel, *Ford Mach I*, Burak's main antagonist is a particular car model; a Ford Mach I. On the jacket of Burak's novel, the editors write: 'Ford Mach I is a deadly love story. It is the story of a woman, who identifies herself with a car, to find a way to resist the alienation of the society. It is a story of self-destruction.' Burak's novel has many references to street names in London, as well as Istanbul:

GO AWAY FROM THIS STREET LEAVE THE RACE
RACE WILL ONLY SHOW YOUR LONELINESS AND
CRAZINESS (...) St JAMES STREET National GALLERY
CHARING CROSS Road Tarla St. Run RUN (...) WELLINGTON Street
EARLS COURT Soho MORTIMER STREET WESTMINSTER
BRIDGE ROAD
DINING Room GIRRRRR GIRR⁴⁹

Burak's novel is a critique of capitalism through a critique of the car industry. At the same time, Burak learned to drive racing cars as research for the novel and was attracted to the car's speed and ability to travel long distances; similarly, Adnan frequently writes about space travel, for example in *The Arab Apocalypse* and in an early poem for Yuri Gagarin.⁵⁰ Both writers are attracted to technology and the potential it offers for opening up spaces beyond fixed geography, but they also imply

⁴⁸ Nilüfer Güngörmüş, *A'dan Z'ye Sevim Burak* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003). My translation.

⁴⁹ Sevim Burak, *Ford Mach I*, ed. by Nilüfer Güngörmüş (Erdem), 4 edn (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2019), pp.56-57.

⁵⁰ Adnan, *To look at the sea is to become what one is - An Etel Adnan Reader*, pp.7-20.

its role in the destructive militarism of the Space Race (Adnan) and the car industry (Burak).

Working With History

‘...People were afraid that their poetry would escape from their books and overthrow reality.’ (Antonin Artaud)⁵¹

Adnan’s *The Arab Apocalypse* primarily concerns the civil war in Lebanon during the 1970s. She talks about this conflict in an interview with Lynne Tillman in the American magazine, *Bidoun*:

There is the presence of war in almost everything I write. Beirut’s importance is because of war; it’s a child of WWI. In 1920 we had refugees from Armenia. WWII brought foreign armies, not bloodshed. Beirut profited, because when armies are around, there’s money. In ’58 a little civil war started. In ’67 another batch of refugees. In ’71 the Israelis bombed the airport. In ’75, the start of fifteen years of civil war. In 1982, the Israelis entered Beirut. There were other Israeli incursions, constant bombing of the south. Beirut was done and almost undone by war.⁵²

Adnan’s book was born due to the political crisis she was witnessing. Her earlier long poem “Jebu”, written in 1969 and published in the radical Moroccan journal *Souffles-Anflas* in an issue dedicated to the Palestinian revolution, deals with similar issues to

⁵¹ Antonin Artaud, “Letter About Lautréamont”, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Susan Sontag, trans. by Helen Weaver, 2 edn (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p.471.

⁵² Tillman, ‘Etel Adnan - Children of the sun’. *Bidoun*, founded by Lisa Farjam, is a magazine focusing on arts and culture, operating from Brooklyn, New York since 2004. (<https://www.bidoun.org/about/introduction>)

The Arab Apocalypse. The poem starts with the lines: ‘o dead cities of the XXIst century/ Beirut and Tel Aviv!’ and continues: ‘(...) We have now to crucify/ the Crucified/ his age-long treason has sickened us’⁵³ Adnan wrote “Jebu” first in French, like *The Arab Apocalypse*, and then translated it into English herself. Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio write about Adnan’s poem and translation in the introduction to *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology From The Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics*: ‘Etel Adnan’s self-translation of “Jebu”, a text she originally published forty-five years ago (in *Souffles* 15, 1969) features many revisions that represent her vision of the poem as a mature poet (self-) translator’.⁵⁴ In revisiting the poem to translate it, Adnan produced a new, up-dated text. July Westhale writes on *Lambda Literary*: ‘Her work shows the veins of a larger literary conversation about collective and shared consciousness, or the conversation between personal and national trauma. This conversation, which delves into the intersectionality of war, famine, mass disease, genocide, crimes against humanity, dictatorship, political exile, etc., is a devastatingly important one.’⁵⁵ Adnan’s work is not afraid to open up a conversation about these issues. Thus she explicitly writes about the political crisis in Lebanon in *The Arab Apocalypse*: ‘Where do you want ghosts to reside? / In our wakeful hours there are flowers which produce nightmares/ We burned continents of silence the future of nations/ the breathing of the fighters got thicker became like oxen’s’.⁵⁶ As a poet and painter, who has varied roots (a Greek mother from Smyrna and an Arabic father working as an officer during the Ottoman Empire), Adnan grew

⁵³ *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology From The Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics*, ed. by Olivia C. Harrison, Teresa Villa-Ignacio (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015), pp.191-192.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ July Westhale, ‘To look at the sea is to become what one is: An Etel Adnan Reader’ by Etel Adnan (2014) <<https://www.lambdaliterary.org/reviews/nonfiction/08/12/to-look-at-the-sea-is-to-become-what-one-is-an-etel-adnan-reader-by-etel-adnan/>> [accessed 25 June 2020].

⁵⁶ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.63.

up in between different histories and languages: she grew up speaking Turkish, Greek and Arabic and later learned French in school. Because of this family background, and because of witnessing the civil war in Lebanon first-hand, her work, by its nature, is interwoven with history and with different cultural narratives.

Bachmann's relationship to history was also complicated, and it became an important force in her writing. Her father was a member of the Austrian National Socialist (Nazi) Party, and she had an important relationship with the Romanian-born, German-speaking Jewish poet Paul Celan. She often reflected on the problem of Austrian and German anti-Semitism. We see this, for example, in the presence of a Celan-like figure in her novel *Malina*, particularly the fairy-tale sections written after his death, which directly reference Celan's poetry.⁵⁷ She herself was openly against the fascism of the German state and wrote about it extensively. Bachmann was also openly critical of Heidegger, who defended the Nazi regime during the second world war; she wrote her doctoral thesis in 1949 as a critique of him.⁵⁸

This history had particular implications for her relationship with the German language. Her poem "Exile" begins with the lines, 'I am a dead man who wanders/ registered nowhere', and continues: 'I with the German language/ this cloud around me/ which I keep as a house/ press though all languages'.⁵⁹ History had, indeed, made the German language a "cloud" surrounding Bachmann and her writing. In addition, Bachmann consistently argued that the end of the second world war had not erased

⁵⁷ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina*, trans. by Philip Boehm (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier, 1990). For a discussion of these elements, see Alice James, 'Das Briefgeheimnis: Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan's Poetics of Correspondence' (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Durham, 2015), pp. 2-3, 83-5.

⁵⁸ Achberger, *Understanding Bachmann*, p.58.

⁵⁹ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.313.

the problems of fascism in Germany and Austria. Karen R. Achberger writes on Bachmann's poetry: 'Bachmann wrote poetry voicing the moral exigencies of the times, a work so rooted in the specific historical moment of the 1950s as to be unmistakably a call to moral engagement and utopian striving.'⁶⁰ In this historical and political context, departure and flight became an important theme in Bachmann's poetry. In her poem 'Until I return', dated between 1962 and 1963, she writes: 'But who I am now is one capable/ of eating fire, no longer familiar to anyone.'⁶¹ From this puzzling narrative, which seems almost a riddle, we can see Bachmann's despair and hopelessness, as an antifascist writer struggling to communicate themselves within the dominant historical narrative which erases and passes over the horrors of Nazism. Fire eaters are circus performers who give the illusion of an impossible feat (eating fire): circus performers, who work in itinerant and often precarious situations, provide an analogy for the left-wing, experimental poet in a situation of historical contingency.

Bachmann's radio plays were also in dialogue with historical happenings beyond Germany: she studied in America and developed a critique of commercialism within the military-industrial complex. In *The Good God Of Manhattan* she writes: 'THINK ABOUT IT WHILE THERE IS TIME / GIVE GOD A CHANCE / BRIGHTEN UP YOUR LIFE...' As Karen Achberger writes in *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*:

A chorus of the city's public 'Voices' cite a litany of advertising slogans and clichés in endless repetition and variation. Throughout the play, the lovers are bombarded with commands and slogans, boldly printed in the text in all

⁶⁰ Achberger, *Understanding Bachmann*, p.16.

⁶¹ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, pp.375-377.

capital letters [...] The radio play [...] stem[s] from the period immediately following Bachmann's visit to New York city in July 1955. Her first encounter with a technologically advanced, capitalist society seems to have left her shocked at the constant bombardment with indoctrinating slogans in the mass media.⁶²

Likewise, Burak wrote about the changes Istanbul was going through, as a multicultural city. I will explore these issues related to the sudden developments (the rise of the car industry) and changes in Istanbul further in my chapter on Burak.

All these three writers wrote under the shadow of the history. All of them sought imaginary landscapes, both as an escape from history and gender violence, and as a way of confronting it. While they often dealt directly with contemporary political crises, they were also influenced by diverse sources, from different literary and linguistic cultures and historical time periods, from Shakespeare to Hölderlin, Rimbaud to Aimé Césaire, and refused to be limited to a single framework or context. They also worked in different media. Bachmann worked closely with the composer Hans Werner Henze on the libretti for his operas *The Prince of Hamburg* (*Der Prinz von Hamburg*, 1958) and *The Young Lord* (*Der Junge Lord*, 1964) and in his settings of her poetry in *Serenades and Arias* (1957) and *Choral Fantasy* (1964). Writing novels, libretti, short stories, essays and radio plays as well as poetry, she produced work, like that of Burak and Adnan, crosses the borders and boundaries of genre, refusing to be limited to any one form.

⁶² Achberger, *Understanding Bachmann*, p.19.

Through their experimental practices, these three writers create poetic spaces as spaces of possibility, which cross over linguistic difference, national boundaries, historical time periods, and generic categories. My access to their work has thus occurred through an international set of contexts. While Burak is the only one of these authors to write in Turkish, both Adnan and Bachmann have been translated into Turkish and their books are easy to access in Turkey. The Turkish poet Lale Müldür alludes to Bachmann in her poem “Hello to a Leaf Collector”: ‘goodnight / Ingeborg, Hölderlin, Heidegger, Dubourg/ goodnight’.⁶³ More recently, Etel Adnan’s work has been included in an issue of the French magazine *Confluences poetiques* that also features a selection of contemporary established poets from Turkey, such as Müldür and Enis Batur.⁶⁴ As such, my engagement with their work indicates touchstones I share with modern experimental Turkish writing, even as my encounter with Adnan and Bachmann has occurred principally through Anglophone contexts, such as witnessing Adnan’s reading at the Serpentine Gallery in 2016 during my MA studies and attending the launch of a the revised English-language translation of Bachmann’s *Malina* at the Austrian Cultural Forum in London in 2019. Given this, like the work of these three writers, my creative practice also seeks to avoid categorization by national identity, language and fixed form, complicating accounts of singular ‘cultural narratives’ and creating an alternative topography of the poetic imagination. In what follows, I will provide more detailed readings of the three poets’ works in individual chapters. I will proceed chronologically by the date of each writer’s birth, beginning with Adnan, continuing with Bachmann, and ending with

⁶³ Lale Müldür, *Anemon / Toplu Şiirler (1988-1998)*, 6 edn (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2020), p.207. My translation.

⁶⁴ Zéno Bianu, Salah Stétié, Frédéric Jacques Temple, Charles Dobzynski, Gabrielle Althen, Alain Lance, Luis Mizón, Marie-Claire Bancquart, Werner Lambersy, Tahar Bekri, Gil Jouanard, Paul Louis Rossi, Philippe Delaveau, Jean Portante, Sylvestre Clancier, Hubert Haddad, Eric Sarner, *Confluences poétiques*, ed. by Luis Mizón (Paris: Le Printemps des Poètes, 2012).

Burak. The critical portion of my thesis ends with a chapter about these authors' influence on my own work, as well as my divergence from their material.

CHAPTER ONE.

‘UNSETTLED DISSIDENT ERUPTIVE IN ANARCHY’:

ETEL ADNAN

‘a militant sky aims its Kalashnikov at the earth Bang!’⁶⁵

Etel Adnan is a Lebanese – American poet, painter and writer, who was born in 1925 in Beirut. Her mother was a Greek from Smyrna (today’s İzmir in Turkey) and her father was an Ottoman officer who was born in Damascus. Adnan went to French-speaking schools in Lebanon and spoke a combination of Greek and Turkish at home. She studied philosophy at the Sorbonne University in Paris, and then moved to the United States in 1955 for a postgraduate degree in Philosophy at U.C. Berkeley and Harvard University.⁶⁶ Due to her feelings about the Algerian War, she began to consider the political implications of writing in French. As a result, she stopped writing in French and started expressing herself through visual arts in 1960, as a self-taught painter.⁶⁷ She started writing poetry again through her participation with American Writers Against the Vietnam War in 1965 and, through writing in English became, in her own words, an “American poet”.⁶⁸ She moved back to Lebanon in 1972 and worked as a cultural editor for newspapers *Al Safa* and *L’Orient le Jour*. She continued living in Lebanon until 1976, when the Lebanese civil war began, and then she moved back to Paris. Her first book-length publication, the novel *Sitt Marie Rose*, was published in France in 1977 and won the prestigious “France-Pays Arabes”

⁶⁵ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.24.

⁶⁶ Etel Adnan, *About* <<http://www.eteladnan.com>> [accessed 25 June 2020].

⁶⁷ Thom Donovan, Brandon Shimoda, *To Look At The Sea Is To Become What One Is*, Nightboat Books, pp.245-28.

⁶⁸ Adnan, *About*.

award. In this chapter I will focus on her poetry book *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989, Post-Apollo Press).

The Arab Apocalypse

The Arab Apocalypse is a sequence of poems, written first in French (it was initially published in 1980 as *L'Apocalypse arabe*), and then translated into English by Adnan herself in 1989.⁶⁹ The title of the book refers to the Lebanese civil war, which lasted from 1975 to 1990. This fifteen-year-long war is the main subject of Adnan's poetry sequence; however, she writes about many other nations and ethnic minorities in the book, as I will discuss later. One of the most distinctive characteristics of *The Arab Apocalypse* is Adnan's use of glyphs alongside poems. The book has hand-drawn symbols, reminiscent of hieroglyphs, which also suggest a visual reading of the poems, just by reading out loud, or interpreting the symbols:

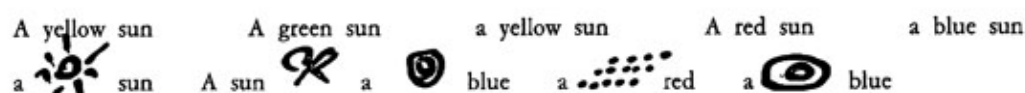


Illustration I: Etel Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.7

In an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, the curator of her 2018 show at the Serpentine Gallery in London, Adnan talks about her use of glyphs: ‘the signs are my excess of emotions. I cannot say more. I wrote by hand, and, here and there, I put a word, and I made instinctively a little drawing, a sign. ... Maybe it is because I see these apocalypses ... because my first thought is always explosive. It is not

⁶⁹ It is the English text which I will discuss in the chapter.

cumulative'.⁷⁰ Adnan's way of working is instinctive; while 'cumulative' suggests a careful build-up of logical thought, with a statement emerging from a considered period of reflection, 'explosive' suggests a more destructive force, matching the political 'apocalypses' Adnan witnesses. As Adnan says, *The Arab Apocalypse* reads as if it has been written instinctively. The text has an urgency that connects to its symbolic figure of energy, which is the sun, generated through its stop-start verbal rhythm.

The book combines the characteristics of both Etel Adnan the poet and Etel Adnan the painter. While the drawings in *The Arab Apocalypse* are printed in black and white, the text next to them ('a green sun a yellow sun A red sun a blue sun') recalls the aesthetic choices evident in her paintings, which contain mainly bright, pastel colours. Adnan's paintings combine abstraction with representational depictions of landscape, such as mountains and sky, in simplified shapes and with exaggerated blocks of colour not found in nature. Likewise, glyphs are readable characters, but Adnan's do not correspond exactly to any existent glyph system. Adnan's employment of them in the text suggests that she uses them as a supplementary language, as her own invented sign language. Thus, two different sign systems are in operation, one drawing attention to the limitations of the other.⁷¹ Caroline Seymour-Jorn writes that Adnan's choice of using both visual and verbal language:

suggests [...] that language, even poetic language, is inadequate to describe the human experience of occupation and war. Indeed, throughout the poems of *The Arab*

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Mark Byers, *Charles Olson and American Modernism: The Practice of the Self* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.110-111.

Apocalypse, Adnan sometimes seems to abandon language altogether as a method for communicating her ideas, and instead inserts sketches to complete the lines of poetry.⁷²

Etel Adnan herself confirms this interpretation in describing how she came to write the book:

The Arab Apocalypse is hard to face, for me, since I wrote in the thick of the civil war in Lebanon, and since I started it because that war seemed then to be a dreadful turning point, an ominous one — the beginning of unending disasters not only for Lebanon, but for the whole Arab world, and a vortex that would touch the world at large, and that has been true.⁷³

As this statement suggests, in *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan writes not just about one nation, but the suffering of many:

⁷² Lisa Suhair Majaj, Amal Amireh, *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist*, p.43.

⁷³ Andy Fitch, *The Non-Expressible Part of Thinking: Talking to Etel Adnan* (2017) <<https://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/interviews/non-expressible-part-thinking-talking-etel-adnan/>> [accessed 14 October 2020].

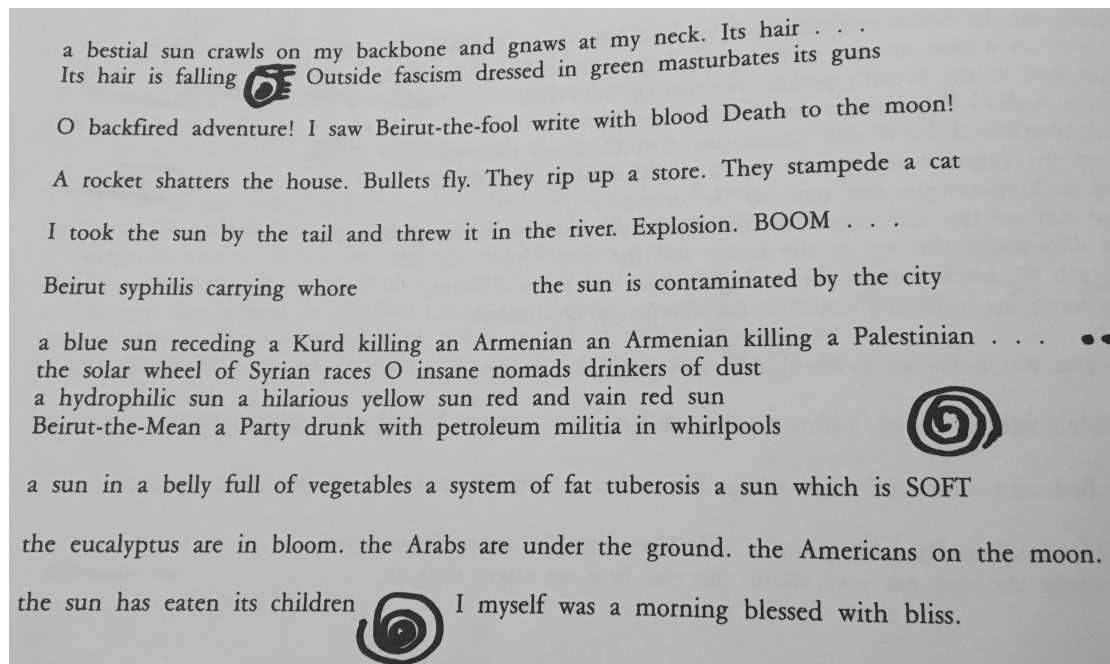


Illustration II: Etel Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.20

This larger geopolitics is made explicit in the central lines quoted above: ‘a blue sun receding a Kurd killing an Armenian and Armenian killing a Palestinian... / the solar wheel of Syrian races O insane nomads drinkers of dust / [...] the Arabs are under the ground. the Americans on the moon. / the sun has eaten its children’.⁷⁴ Adnan comments that the war in her homeland, Lebanon seemed to ‘touch the world at large’, and the juxtaposition of the sun – a witness of the violence below – and the American space race suggests a catastrophe that extends, not just across the globe, but beyond it, into space.

One of Adnan’s thematic concerns in *The Arab Apocalypse* is the inadequacy of language during times of crisis and political unrest. In the context of the Lebanese war, she found herself conscious of the act of writing (and its necessity for civilization) but also questioning the adequacy of language:

⁷⁴ Ibid.

It is also true (I don't know why) that I was particularly aware of the act of writing, I would say the civilizational presence, or nature, of the fact of writing, during the actual writing of the poem. The signs, drawings or hieroglyphs mingling with the words, or sometimes making lines by themselves, were the overflow of meaning, of what couldn't be said, the non-expressible part of thinking, the continuation in a way I myself couldn't know.⁷⁵

As this suggests, one reason Adnan combined visual and verbal language was that verbal expression on its own was not enough to express the violence surrounding her. The glyphs she uses are not simply illustrations that privilege the visual over the verbal. In the example quoted above ('a Kurd killing an Armenian and Armenian killing a Palestinian...'), ellipses follow the list of killings. Ellipses are traditionally used in writing to mark the point at which a character's speech trails off, often due to an overflow of emotions, which cannot be expressed in language.⁷⁶ They are a visual marker of an emotional silence or an emotional fullness. An ellipsis is a feature of text, but, here, the way it is present on the page aligns it with the glyphs. It draws attention to the materiality of punctuation. In the passage quoted above, Adnan then inserts two types of glyphs: the spiral for whirlpools and the reverse spiral for the sun. The first acts as a gloss to 'militia in whirlpools', the second interacts with 'the sun has eaten its children' (which perhaps alludes to the Roman god Saturn, eating his children). Together they suggest an emotional response to the violence.

⁷⁵ Andy Fitch, *The Non-Expressible Part of Thinking: Talking to Etel Adnan*.

⁷⁶ *Princeton Handbook of Poetics* defines an ellipse as: 'A figure wherein a word, or several words, usually of little importance to the logical expression of thought but ordinarily called for by the construction, are omitted.' *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms: Third Edition*, ed. by Roland Green, Stephen Cushman, 3 edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), p.63.

As well as through the use of glyphs, *The Arab Apocalypse* challenges the boundaries of conventional language in other ways. It is written in long, unpunctuated lines, full of unexpected capitalized words, onomatopoeia ('BZZ BZZ BZZ BZZZ') and constant repetitions, which throughout play an instrumental role in the text, in terms of rhythm and musicality: 'O Moaning HOU HOU HOU like wind in the belly HOU HOU HOU HOU MORE THAN/ WIDOWED'.⁷⁷ In Arabic "HOU" refers to a vernacular form of hailing – to call something or someone - roughly equivalent to the English "hey", but it is also used by dervishes as a greeting.⁷⁸ Here, in the context of the words 'moaning' and 'widowed', it suggests the ululation of Arab women in mourning and lamentation. However, the continuous presence of "HOU" in the book comes to suggest an urgent address to another – perhaps the reader – but also a more private address, contemplation, in the form of howling.⁷⁹

Adnan's use of the capitalized words "HOU" is continuous in the book, alongside the capitalized "STOP" and the ever-changing "sun":

STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP
 a sun airborne a sun — airplane circles up there . . .
 there is no water ● no plasma ● no air there is the radio
 there are star fish streaking in the night
 the Tuaregs arrive motorized empty-handed
 .
 HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU . HOU . HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU !

Illustration III: Etel Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p. 54

Jalal Toufic writes in the English edition of *The Arab Apocalypse*: 'The reader is soon alarmed by the repeated telegraphic STOP of this book that orbits the following

⁷⁷ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.16.

⁷⁸ As this word is a vernacular expression, it is not found in conventional English-Turkish dictionaries.

⁷⁹ Reinhold Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama: British Travellers in 19th Century Turkey* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Rodopi, 1999), p.200.

doomed objects: the Sun and Tall al-Za'tar and Quarantina, two refugee camps that were besieged and criminally destroyed during the Lebanese Civil War.⁸⁰ As Toufic suggests, the capitalized use of STOP could be read as in a telegram or radio transmission. Adnan's reporting of the war, as in Adnan's editorial work in newspapers, comes to mind. It could also be punctuation in the text. She writes: 'I tell the sun's story it answers I decode it sends new messages I decode'.⁸¹ While the instruction 'stop' in a telegram simply refers to the end of a sentence, 'stop' here also seems to function as a verbal instruction. This could be Adnan's wish for the nonexistence of the refugee camps or for an end to the violence that destroyed them. In the sentence that follows, she tells various things to 'stop': 'O disaster STOP O sun STOP O bliss STOP STOP a broken engine'.⁸² This list of items is very varied, and Adnan makes impossible demands, some of which seem counter-productive – one would not wish bliss to stop, and telling the sun to stop would end human life on earth. At the end of the line, 'stop' seems to change from a verb to become an evocation of an engine that has stopped – 'STOP STOP a broken engine'. This could also be read as a description of the way the poetic line itself moves in a stop-start rhythm.

In the book as a whole, there is a tension between various forms of energy. There are various positive forms of energy: solar energy, the energies of bliss, or the energies of the engine's turning motor, as well as references elsewhere to space travel and the joy of exploration, going out of the earth and beyond nations. Adnan references the Soviet cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, who was the first man in space, in *The Arab Apocalypse*:

⁸⁰ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.4.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

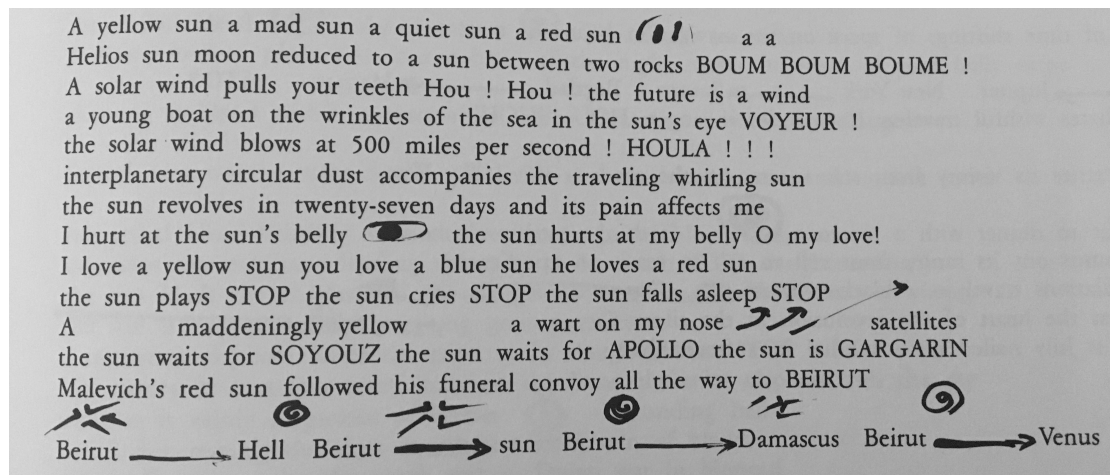


Illustration IV: Etel Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.27

‘the sun waits for SOYOUZ the sun waits for APOLLO the sun is GAGARIN/ Malevich’s red sun followed his funeral convoy all the way to BEIRUT’.⁸³ Adnan links Apollo, the god of the sun, to Yuri Gagarin, and then, through the ‘red sun’, links Yuri Gagarin to the Russian revolutionary artist Malevich. Apollo is also the name of the US space programme, and Adnan references here the US/USSR space race, which is an extension of the Cold War beyond earth.⁸⁴ This is a link to more violent forms of energy – most notably, national conflict, often characterized by violent physical movement: invasions, retreats, and massacres.⁸⁵

Adnan’s glyphs have a complex relation to visual and verbal expression and the inexpressible, and her figures of energy are also contradictory and complex. The sun is a central figure here. It sometimes seems to watch the massacres below, sometimes to retreat from them (‘a blue sun receding’) and sometimes to encourage or reflect them (‘the sun has eaten its children’). Lindsay Turner writes in the *Kenyon Review*: ‘In *The Arab Apocalypse* [...] a surrealist imagination of the sun as force of violence

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Andrew Chaikin, *A Man on the Moon: The Voyages of the Apollo Astronauts* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1994), p.5.

⁸⁵ I will discuss the role of energy in the poem below.

and global oppression, [is] accompanied by the calligraphic signs.’⁸⁶ As Turner suggests, we can think of the sun, which is the main image in the book, as an unending, continuous symbol of violence. As I will show below, it often seems to participate in this violence. But the sun could also be the victim in these poems, who is punished by the acts of violence. For example, Adnan writes: ‘They cut the sun’s ears and stuffed them in a jar... The yellow sun shrank amputated he called his mother’.⁸⁷ Frequently, too, Adnan’s sun, just like the reader, is simply a witness to the political catastrophe, guiding the narrator of the poems.

Aditi Machado writes in *Jacket 2*: ‘*The Arab Apocalypse* offers evidence of violence, but to use the word “evidence” might suggest something like an objective — or at least unaffected — observer recording that which happens outside of her, offering to us the legible document of a [holocaust].’⁸⁸ Nevertheless, she continues, it is important to think of the sun as ‘a witness to human politics’:

This is partly because I read Adnan’s sun not as some casual pathetic fallacy but as the endpoint of an extreme logic in which who else but the sun is left to witness us, and partly because the sun gives us a model, somewhat detached from our human selves, whose agency as a witness, whose dual ability to testify and to be cruel in testifying, we can critique.’⁸⁹

In the *New Inquiry*, Andrew Durbin suggests an alternative interpretation:

⁸⁶ Lindsay Turner, ‘Contemplating Apocalypse: On the Work of Etel Adnan’, *Kenyon Review*, (2015), in <<https://kenyonreview.org/kr-online-issue/2015-spring/selections/on-etel-adnan-738439/>> [accessed 14 October 2020].

⁸⁷ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.46.

⁸⁸ Machado, *On Etel Adnan’s ‘The Arab Apocalypse’*.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

In her astonishing book-length poem, *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan pits a colonizing, violent sun against the moon and the earth. In the poem, the image of the moon is recuperated as a consoling, benevolent force of memory set in direct opposition to the sun, which not only gives light to violence (and therefore endorses it) but is itself “a pool of blood”.⁹⁰

Similarly, Caroline Seymour-Jorn writes, in ‘*The Arab Apocalypse as a Critique of Colonialism and Imperialism*’: ‘Many of the poems [...] pit the ruthless power of the sun against that of the sea, the moon, and the earth and its inhabitants’.⁹¹ At other times, however, Adnan’s “sun” is the ever-present witness of the catastrophes these inhabitants are facing, guilty only of indifference, of not taking any action. As Seymour-Jorn also acknowledges: ‘Adnan’s sun sometimes seems merely to be an element of a larger universe that follows its own cycles and is completely indifferent to the travails of human beings on earth’.⁹²

For Machado, as we have seen, the sun is the ultimate, non-human witness to human suffering. It is indifferent but sees everything. In this way, the sun links to the imagery of eyes throughout the book: ‘Eye of Baudelaire haunted by violence Divine eye haunted by matter... Eye of Baudelaire mercenary back from Angola shipped by cable’.⁹³ For Adnan, Baudelaire, here is a representative of metropolitan France. His poems were influential on a tradition of French-language radical poetry from which

⁹⁰ Andrew Durbin, ‘Lessons of Engagement’, *The New Inquiry*, (2014), in <<https://thenewinquiry.com/lessons-of-engagement/>> [accessed 14 October 2020].

⁹¹ Lisa Suhair Majaj, Amal Amireh, *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist*, p.38.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.64.

Adnan draws, a tradition, which includes poets such as Rimbaud and Aimé Césaire.⁹⁴ He seems to be invoked here as a poetic predecessor in witnessing the horrors of imperial conflict. At the same time, Adnan acknowledges the complicity of poets such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud in French imperialism but retains them as a revolutionary example: “—I told her: I love Rimbaud / —She said: you love a gun runner! / —I said: / I will hit you / with my fists”.⁹⁵ Here we can also think of Kristin Ross’s work on Rimbaud’s poetry of the Paris Commune, and his use as a revolutionary example for the anti-colonial poetry of Aimé Césaire.⁹⁶ Ross writes: ‘The future, in other words, is an indispensable dimension of Rimbaud’s poetic dialogue with time and history. One of the most significant of these dialogues takes place between Rimbaud and the French speaking contemporary poet most in his lineage, Aimé Césaire.’⁹⁷ In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire argues that proto-surrealist poets such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Lautréamont provide better analyses of the monstrous nature of capitalist society and the evils of colonialism than the realistic accounts of Balzac:

[...] it is high time to dissipate the atmosphere of scandal that has been created around the ‘Chants de Maldoror.’ Monstrosity? Literary meteorite? Delirium of a sick imagination? Come, now! How convenient it is! The truth is that Lautréamont had only to look the iron man forged by capitalist society squarely in the eye to perceive the monster, the everyday monster, his hero [...] Take Vautrin, let him be just back from the tropics, give him the wings of the archangel and the shivers of malaria, let

⁹⁴ Thom Donovan, *Teaching Etel Adnan's The Arab Apocalypse*, (2010) <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2010/02/teaching-etel-adnans-the-arab-apocalypse>> [accessed 14 October 2020].

⁹⁵ Adnan, *To look at the sea is to become what one is - An Etel Adnan Reader*, p.263.

⁹⁶ Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (London, UK: Verso, 2007).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

him be accompanied through the streets of Paris by an escort of Uruguyan vampires and carnivorous ants, and you will have Maldoror. The setting is changed, but it is the same world, the same man, hard, inflexible, unscrupulous, fond, if ever a man was, of ‘the flesh of other men.’⁹⁸

The ‘Divine eye’ in the passage cited above could also be read as “nazar”, both the ‘evil eye’ that suggests another’s evil, and the charm worn for protecting oneself from the evil eye.⁹⁹ Made of homemade glass with concentric circles or teardrop shapes, nazars are common in Turkey, Lebanon and other Eastern European and Arabic countries. Some of the glyphs in the book suggest both the sun and the nazar. The sun as the ‘Divine eye’ further suggests the *wedjat*, the ‘all-seeing eye’ of Horus of ancient Egyptian solar mythology. These ‘eyes’ are at once an evil gaze and protection against it, and reflect the ambivalence of the sun in Adnan’s poem.

Rimbaud’s well-known poem “*Soleil et chair*” (‘Sun and Flesh’) is similarly in dialogue with the sun: ‘The sun, hearth of tenderness in life, /Pours burning love over the delighted earth/ And, when one lies down in the valley, one smells/ How the earth is nubile and rich in blood’.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, the sun recurs throughout Césaire’s *Return to My Native Land (Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal)*:

At the end of the small hours...

⁹⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham, 2 edn (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2000), p.66. See also, Christopher Winks, “*Making Diamonds out of Insults*” (2013) <<https://Césairelegacies.cdrcs.columbia.edu/trans-atlantic-networks/making-diamonds/>> [accessed 14 October 2020]. and Stephen Walton, ‘Baudelaire and the Roots of “Négritude”’, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 39/40.34, (1997), pp.77-88.

⁹⁹ Abdul Jamil Khan, *Urdu/Hindi: An Artificial Divide: African Heritage, Mesopotamian roots, Indian Culture & British Colonialism* (New York, NY: Algora Publishing, 2006), p.138.

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Nicholas-Arthur Rimbaud, *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters - A Bilingual Edition*, trans. by Wallace Fowlie, 2 edn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.13-23.

Get away, I said, you bastard of a copy, swine get away. I hate the livery of order and the fish-hooks of hope [...] Rocked there on the breath of inexhaustible thought I heard [...] a river to protect me against the corruptions of the dusk that are paced day and night by a damned venereal sun.¹⁰¹

As in Rimbaud, the sun is associated with violence: ‘At the four corners of these small hours [...] will not the splendor of this blood explode?’; ‘Blood! Blood! All our blood roused by the male heart of the sun’.¹⁰² Césaire ultimately seems to reject the sun as he leaves Europe to return to his native Martinique: ‘And now to be done / with the sun (it is not strong enough to go / to my strong head [...] as I leave Europe / the irritation of its own cries / the silent currents of its despair’.¹⁰³ Through all of these interpretations, Adnan’s militant sun can be read as an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist metaphor which critiques the violence of its surroundings: ‘a Turkish sun an Arab sun a Kurdish sun a Hindu-owlish sun’.¹⁰⁴ As Seymour-Jorn puts it: ‘*The Arab Apocalypse* provides a sweeping critique of colonial, neo-colonial and imperialist violence, warning of the ultimately cataclysmic results of this violence.’¹⁰⁵

It is also possible to see the influence of the Beat Generation on the urgency of *The Arab Apocalypse*. Adnan’s comment to Hans Ulrich Obrist, ‘my first thought is always explosive’, recalls Allen Ginsberg’s famous phrase ‘first thought best thought’.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, Adnan’s use of incantatory repetition resembles Ginsberg’s,

¹⁰¹ Aimé Césaire, *Return to my Native Land*, trans. by John Berger and Anna Bostock, 2 edn (Brooklyn, New York: Archipelago Books, 2014), p.9.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.17.

¹⁰⁵ Lisa Suhair Majaj, Amal Amireh, *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist*, p.49.

¹⁰⁶ *First Thought: Conversations with Allen Ginsberg*, ed. by Michael Schumacher (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

particularly in his poems “Howl” (1957) and “Wichita Vortex Sutra” (1966). Thom Donovan, who co-edited the *Etel Adnan Reader* published by Nightboat Books in 2004, writes that Adnan is ‘clearly channelling/in dialogue with’ the Beats ‘if only by common texts (French existentialism, Artaud, etc.)’. He goes on: ‘I imagine Adnan’s narrator/speaker as a kind of Beat reporter.’¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the sixth poem in *The Arab Apocalypse* seems to invoke Ginsberg’s ‘Wichita Vortex Sutra’ explicitly:

Sun of Wichitah! [sic] Burns the single corn stalk in Wichitah! The mayor’s phallus
One sun in Wichitah Three bulls in Cheyenne STOP my thoughts emerge!¹⁰⁸

In his poem, a response to the Vietnam War, Ginsberg writes:

That the rest of earth is unseen,
Unknown except thru
language
airprint
magic images

[...] On to Wichita to prophesy! O frightful Bard!
into the heart of the Vortex [...]
manifestation of my very thought
accomplished in my own imagination¹⁰⁹

We see here another link to Adnan in Ginsberg’s concerns with the “magic images” of “airprint” representing the war in Vietnam. Vietnam was famously the first

¹⁰⁷ Donovan, ‘Teaching Etel Adnan’s *The Arab Apocalypse*’.

¹⁰⁸ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.17.

¹⁰⁹ Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems 1947-1997* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), p.402.

televised war, and these images break down geographical distance, but are also inadequate: they are the only way that Americans can access the rest of the earth, but they also leave their viewers apparently powerless in the face of an imperial conflict they can only witness from afar. Similarly, as discussed above, Adnan's use of non-representational glyphs gestures at the written word's inability to express war and suffering. Combined with her repeated references to news media such as the radio and cable transmissions, these convey a sense of forms of linguistic mediation that can distort as well as convey political conflict. Finally, as Adnan proclaims "my thoughts emerge!" Ginsberg too emphasizes "my very thought / accomplished in my own imagination", which connects to his process of poetic composition. Ginsberg composed his poem through dictation into an Uher tape recorder, while travelling across the country in 1966.¹¹⁰ Ginsberg described this process later:

Now this Uher microphone has a little on-off gadget here (click!) and then when you hear the click it starts it again, so the way I was doing it was this (click!); when I clicked it on again it meant I had something to say [...] So when transcribing, I pay attention to the clicking on and off of the machine, which is literally the pauses, [...] as I wait for phrases to formulate themselves [...] And then, having paid attention to the clicks, arrange the phrasings on the page visually, as somewhat the equivalent of how they arrive in the mind and how they're vocalized on the tape recorder [...] These lines in "Wichita" are arranged according to their organic time-spacing as per the mind's coming up with the phrases and the mouth pronouncing them. With pauses maybe of a minute or two minutes between each line as I'm formulating it in

¹¹⁰ Rolf Potts, *The Last Antiwar Poem* (2006) <<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/last-antiwar-poem/>> [accessed 14 October 2020].

my mind and the recording [...] like if you're talking aloud, if you're talking-- composing aloud or talking aloud to yourself.¹¹¹

Ginsberg's pause here ('click') functions in a similar way to Adnan's earlier-discussed 'STOP'. While, as Donovan notes, it is hard to tell if Adnan is specifically referencing his poem, both 'Wichita Vortex Sutra' and *The Arab Apocalypse* share the sense of being alternative news reports, delivered with breathless energy to describe and counteract evil, and both share the central image of the vortex as a figure of energy.

The quickness in Adnan's writing distinguishes *The Arab Apocalypse* from her other books of poetry. This quickness is manifested in terms of both rhythm and style. Thus, for example, Adnan writes: 'shiftings of time shiftings of space on the navigation board of matter/ Paris- Jupiter New York-Saturn Baghdad-Mercury STOP/ the sun hates wishful travelers It explodes in anger. HOU ! HOU !'¹¹² As Patrick James Dunagan observes: 'Every line [is] an urgent message full of fury, confusion, surreal vision, and abundant passion directed outwards at a not so unrealizable world. The sentiments, values, and experience attested are so vividly imminent it as if the ink were scored out upon the page, gouging its way into the eyes of the reader.'¹¹³

This passage also raises another issue. Lindsay Turner suggests that Adnan's assembled work asks the question: 'can you think without place, or write anything

¹¹¹ Allen Ginsberg, *Composed on the Tongue: Literary Conversations, 1967-1977*, ed. by Donald Allen, 2 edn (San Francisco, CA: Grey Fox Press, 2001).

¹¹² Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.28.

¹¹³ Patrick James Dunagan, *To look at the sea is to become what one is by Etel Adnan* (2014) <<https://therumpus.net/2014/09/to-look-at-the-sea-is-to-become-what-one-is-by-etel-adnan/>> [accessed 14 October 2020].

that does not bear the traces of the colours, sunlights, sounds, fogs, wars, and persecutions of its “place” of composition[?]’¹¹⁴ *The Arab Apocalypse* frequently registers places both terrestrial and beyond this world: ‘Paris – Jupiter, New York – Saturn, Bagdad – Mercury STOP’, ‘Sun – DELAWARE – BEIRUT HELL’.¹¹⁵ The locations - ‘Paris’, New York’, ‘Bagdad’ - are an almost parodic version of the cosmopolitan modernist writer’s locationary signing-off.¹¹⁶ The planetary names both undermine this and link to the glyphs that punctuate the poems. The concluding ‘BEIRUT HELL’, however, has a different function: it is a reminder of the 1975 Lebanese conflict, which was the context for the writing.¹¹⁷ Adnan’s narrator is impatient for this absence, which is the end of the Lebanese civil war. In *The Arab Apocalypse*, there is an “absence” which is referred to throughout the book: ‘The night of the non-event. War in vacant sky. The Phantom’s absence’, ‘Absence Absence Absence Absence Death to those who keep waiting’.¹¹⁸

As Turner writes: ‘The cosmopolitan figure Adnan cuts [...] is thoroughly invested in telling the stories of specific nations and people.’¹¹⁹ Adnan’s subsequent work continues to tell such stories. In her powerful collection of letters, *Of Cities and Women (Letters to Fawwaz)*, Adnan corresponds with her friend Fawwaz Trabulsi from her travels in Barcelona, Aix-en-Provence, Skopelos, Murcia, Amsterdam, Berlin, Rome and Beirut. As Adnan explains it, *Of Cities and Women* happened as if by chance. ‘Around 1990 I received a request from a friend, Fawwaz Trabulsi, who

¹¹⁴ Turner, ‘Contemplating Apocalypse: On the Work of Etel Adnan’.

¹¹⁵ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, pp.28-47.

¹¹⁶ See the final page of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 5 edn (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.933.

¹¹⁷ Etel Adnan also has a poem titled ‘Beirut Hell Express’, see Adnan, *To look at the sea is to become what one is - An Etel Adnan Reader*, pp.73-86. See Edgar O’Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon, 1975-92* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

¹¹⁸ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, pp.11-73.

¹¹⁹ Turner, ‘Contemplating Apocalypse: On the Work of Etel Adnan’.

said he was planning to launch a magazine (in French) concerning the Arab world, and that he would like to have a paper from me on Arab feminism.’¹²⁰ Adnan’s first letter to her friend starts in Barcelona in 1990, focusing on the subject of feminism: ‘I found the women of this city free,’ Adnan observes, ‘which is to say that they appear to have control over their bodies and their movements.’¹²¹ Attentive to the bodily movements by which gendered roles are performed, Adnan finds possibilities for feminist solidarity in travelling the world, while noting the role of cultural difference and patriarchal attitudes.

In most of her recent collections, including her 2016 book, *Seasons*, Adnan writes prose poetry. In contrast to the kinetic energy of *The Arab Apocalypse*, these pieces of prose poetry are carefully composed and are deeply philosophical, drawing on Adnan’s life-long interest and study in philosophy. *Seasons* is composed of paragraphs a few sentences long, which are also philosophical dialogues of the narrators with themselves. ‘There are imperceptible writings. Language’s triangular shape is applied to vision: a rush of Being’, writes Adnan in the first poem of the book.¹²² Here ‘Language’s triangular shape’ and ‘rush of Being’ reminds us of Adnan’s own relationship with language, from ‘painting in Arabic’ instead of writing in French, her particularly difficult relationship with French due to the Algerian War, and her finding comfort in English as a resort.¹²³ In an interview with the poet Lisa Robertson, Adnan observed: ‘For me philosophy is *really* thinking, as abstractly as

¹²⁰ Fitch, ‘The Non-Expressible Part of Thinking: Talking to Etel Adnan’.

¹²¹ Etel Adnan, *Of Cities & Women (Letters To Fawwaz)* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1993), p.2.

¹²² Etel Adnan, *Seasons* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2008), p.1.

¹²³ Etel Adnan, ‘To Write in a Foreign Language’, *The Etel Adnan Reader*, Nightboat Books. 2014, p.253.

possible'.¹²⁴ Throughout the book we see similar exchanges of ideas, mostly focusing on topics such as writing, thinking, and time, but these are embodied ideas, ideas not separated from feeling. She argues: 'We don't separate thinking from feeling in real life, so why should we separate it in writing?'¹²⁵ In *Seasons*, she writes: 'Writing: the body's imprint on wet sand. Spring is element of thinking; perfect tool. Poetry is a question of speed and time, speed and time.'¹²⁶ Andrew Durbin suggests that, 'In her later book-length poem, *Seasons*, Adnan asks what could be called the general question of her poetics: "Is memory's function to first break down, by its own means, then pick up the pieces and reassemble them, or is it multiplied?"'¹²⁷ This 'general question' of her poetics is inseparable from Adnan's general approach to life: to experience her surroundings first, from nature to political events, then observe, and then write down what would become her books. As Eric Sellin notes, 'Her imagery is often concrete, even mundane, and yet there is a marvellous cosmic sense or vision behind the various elements she provides for our consideration in a given text.'¹²⁸ 'Cosmic vision' here is inseparable from Adnan's internationalist approach to life and work. It comes carefully observed, but also from a particular stance, which she describes as follows: 'I realized that I think more happily, with a more natural flow, when I don't fight my environment. I would even say that my writing is influenced, or rather grows, the way plants grow out of soil and water, from the land I am inhabiting.'¹²⁹ Her later work is an important contribution to the prose poem and to her own *oeuvre*, and deserves further study. My focus in this chapter, however, has been on Adnan's earlier work, as this is the part of her work that has been most

¹²⁴ Lisa Robertson, *Etel Adnan* by Lisa Robertson (2014) <<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/etel-adnan/>> [accessed 14 October 2020].

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Adnan, *Seasons*, p.7.

¹²⁷ Durbin, 'Lessons of Engagement'.

¹²⁸ Suhair Majaj, Amireh, *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist*, p.27.

¹²⁹ Adnan, 'To Write in a Foreign Language', p.256.

influential on my own poetics and the most clearly linked to the work of the other authors in my study: Ingeborg Bachmann and Sevim Burak. In the following chapter, I turn to Bachmann's work, also deeply invested in philosophy, history and alternative topographies.

CHAPTER TWO.
‘BENEATH A FOREIGN SKY’:
INGEBORG BACHMANN

‘Beneath a foreign sky
shadow roses
shadow
on a foreign earth
between roses and shadows
in a foreign water
*my shadow*¹³⁰

Ingeborg Bachmann (1926 – 1973) was an Austrian poet and writer, born in Klagenfurt. Bachmann studied Philosophy, Philology and Psychology at the universities of Innsbruck, Graz and Vienna. She completed her doctoral dissertation on Martin Heidegger, “The Critical Reception of the Existential Philosophy of Martin Heidegger”, in 1950. As noted in the introduction, Bachmann then began to work for the radio station *Rot-Weiss-Rot* in September 1951. A prolific writer, Bachmann was the author of the poetry collections *Die gestundete Zeit (Borrowed / Mortgaged time)* (1953), *Anrufung des Grossen Bären (Invocation of the Great Bear)* (1956), and *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt (I Know No Better Word: Unpublished Works, 2000)*. She is also the author of libretti, *Der Prinz von Homburg (The Prince of Hamburg)* (1960) and *Der junge Lord (The Young Lord)* (1965); two volumes of short stories, *Das dreißigste Jahr (The Thirtieth Year)* (1961), *Simultan (Simultaneous / Three Paths to the Lake, 1972)*; a novel, *Malina* (1999); and a volume of public speeches, *Frankfurter Vorlesungen (Frankfurt Lectures, 1955)*. (These were lectures on poetics at the Goethe University, Frankfurt, key texts for understanding Bachmann.) Two

¹³⁰ “Bachmann, *In the Storm of Roses*, p.129.

volumes of her letters, *Ingeborg Bachmann-Paul Celan: Correspondence* (2010), and *Letters to Felician* (2004) have been published, as well as her *War Diary* (2011).

In this chapter, I will focus on her poetry and her lectures. I will begin with Bachmann's *Frankfurt Lectures*, and then move onto her collections of poetry. I will be using *Darkness Spoken: The Collected Poems of Ingeborg Bachmann* (translated by Peter Filkins, Zephyr Press, 2006), because it is this particular translation of Bachmann's work which has influenced my thinking about poetics.

Frankfurt Lectures: History, Language and the 'I'

Bachmann was invited to give a series of lectures at the Goethe University, Frankfurt, between the years 1959 and 1960. Bachmann's lectures are yet to be fully translated for an English-speaking audience: however, two of them have been translated into English by Douglas Robertson, and they will be my main reference here. Attempting to translate Bachmann's lecture series into English for the first time, Robertson comments that the "Frankfurt Lectures" are 'difficult to translate, as they are as allusive as Bachmann's poetry'.¹³¹ Robertson continues: 'Although they do function admirably as essays in criticism, one cannot hope to convey a fraction of their meaning by simply reproducing the threads of their arguments, because too much denotation and connotation is exuded by individual words and phrases acting in constellation with recurrences of themselves, and with other words and phrases elsewhere in the lectures or in other texts entirely.' Although I cannot myself

¹³¹ Douglas Robertson, 'Untranslated: *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* by Ingeborg Bachmann', *minor literature[s]*, 19th January 2018. Online: <https://minorliteratures.com/2018/01/19/untranslated-frankfurter-vorlesungen-by-ingeborg-bachmann-douglas-robertson/#>. Accessed 13th July 2020.

experience this characteristic of the lectures in the original, it is interesting to me that Robertson's description of her critical work is thus related to her poetry in terms of the complexities of denotation and connotation and the refusal to follow a clear thread. Karen R. Achberger provides another reason for starting with the Frankfurt lectures. She writes on Bachmann's lectures: 'In bridging her early and late periods, the lectures also provide a key to understanding both her early work and its false reception, as well as the subsequent thrust of her late work.'¹³²

The first of Bachmann's lectures is titled "Questions and Pseudo Questions".¹³³ Her first reference point is the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky: 'As recently as thirty years ago the Russian poet Mayakovsky apprised his readers that they had the right to insist that poets not take the mysteries of their *métier* with them into the grave.'¹³⁴ The text Bachmann is referring to here is Mayakovsky's essay "How Are Verses Made" (1926), an essay that was written thirty years earlier. Her choice is significant in that Mayakovsky was an important reference points for left-wing poets, writing as he was – for poets 'working in a revolutionary society that has done away with the mystique of poetic creativity or inspiration.'¹³⁵ In the immediate post-revolutionary period, Mayakovsky wrote works of political propaganda as part of this attempt; however, his growing dissatisfaction with the increasingly limiting impositions placed

¹³² 'As her works fell victim to the very forces they were launched against, namely the conservative establishment of Restoration Germany, Bachmann became a classic case of "misreception", of conflict between authorial intention and dominant modes of reception. From the first collection of poems in 1953 to the last collection of stories in 1972, her works were consistently read against their author's intention in spite of her comments in interviews, lectures and essays, and in spite of the sociocritical thrust of the works themselves.' Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*, p.23.

¹³³ Douglas Robertson, *A Translation of "Fragen und Scheinfragen," a Lecture on Modern German-Language Literature by Ingeborg Bachmann* (2017) <<http://shirtysleeves.blogspot.com/2017/09/a-translation-of-fragen-und.html>> [accessed 15 October 2020].

¹³⁴ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Frankfurter Vorlesungen. Probleme zeitgenössischer Dichtung [Frankfurt Lectures. Problems in Contemporary Literature]*, (Munich and Berlin: Piper, 2016). Bachmann delivered this lecture as part of a five-lecture series at Goethe University Frankfurt during the 1959-1960 winter semester and recorded it for Bavarian Radio in April 1960.

¹³⁵ *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice*, ed. by Martin Travers (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), p.239.

on art with Stalin's ascendancy to power has been well documented.¹³⁶ Bachmann is not a straightforwardly political writer, though she insistently deals with questions of fascism and national identity. Her own relation to politics has shaped her poetics.

Perhaps recalling Mayakovsky, she argues that contemporary lyric poets have not been 'stingy with their announcements' about their practice, but these 'lyric poets' pronouncements' have not led to a consensus. For Bachmann, this may be to do with the multi-faceted nature of poetry itself. As I suggested in my discussion of her relation to Wittgenstein and Heidegger in the introduction to this thesis, for Bachmann, poetry is an important tool to express truths that cannot be expressed in political discourse or philosophy, but it is not a fixed or singular discourse. Bachman herself writes across several different genres, and, as well as by Mayakovsky, she is influenced by many other writers of both poetry and prose who sought to explore alternative ways of expressing themselves, whether political or aesthetic. Bachmann's lectures not only give access to the poet's way of thinking, but they also suggest her literary influences through her references to writers such as Rilke, Proust, Musil and Simone Weil among many others.

What is particularly important about Bachmann's lectures is that they reveal her sense of her relationship to time and history: 'Today nobody is any longer likely to believe that literature can exist independently of the historical situation, that there exists even a single writer whose starting point has not been determined by the givens of this moment in history.'¹³⁷ This perhaps recalls Mayakovsky's concept of 'the social command' as the basic proposition when beginning poetical work: 'To understand the

¹³⁶ Edward James Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

¹³⁷ Robertson, *A Translation of "Fragen und Scheinfragen," a Lecture on Modern German-Language Literature by Ingeborg Bachmann*.

social command accurately, a poet must be in the middle of things and events'; this involves 'a knowledge of the realities of everyday life' and 'an immersion in the scientific study of history.'¹³⁸ While Mayakovsky wrote in the post-revolutionary situation of the Soviet Union, given the location and date of these Frankfurt lectures, the 'historical situation' Bachmann is referring to here can be linked specifically to the post-war condition of Germany and Austria. While Nazism had been defeated, the emergence of the Cold War meant that Germany had been divided into two separate countries, West and East Germany.¹³⁹ This division was concretized and symbolized by the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961.¹⁴⁰ Bachmann, however, does not just write about one 'situation'. As her reference to Mayakovsky suggests, she is very aware of the complex series of historical events across Europe and beyond that lead to the rise of Nazism and the Cold War.

Bachmann argues that, just as we cannot understand literature without understanding this historical situation, neither can we understand this historical situation without paying close attention to language.¹⁴¹ Bachmann is very conscious of the importance of language: 'If we had words, if we had language, we would need no weapons.' In this sentence Bachmann is saying that there would be no need for weapons if we were able to use language up to its full potentiality. Using this conditional phrase, she implies that we do not currently 'have' language. But her sentence perhaps also suggests that the weaponization and militarization of language is itself part of the

¹³⁸ Martin Travers (ed.), *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice*, p.240.

¹³⁹ Hester Vaizey, *Born in the GDR: Living in the Shadow of the Wall* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁴⁰ Manfred Wilke, *The Path to the Berlin Wall: Critical Stages in the History of Divided Germany*, trans. by Sophie Perl (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014).

¹⁴¹ *German and European Poetics After the Holocaust: Crisis and Creativity*, ed. by Gert Hofmann, Marko Pajević, Michael Shields, Rachel Magshamhain (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011).

problem. Bachmann would have been intensely aware of the power of language through the use of loaded terms to justify Nazi expansion (for example, ‘*Anschluss*’ (‘joining’) to describe the annexation of Bachmann’s own Austria in 1938) and the weaponizing of language in the fascist attack on culture (for example, the term ‘*entarte Kunst*’, ‘degenerate art’).¹⁴² As we shall see below, her work also engages with the use of the term ‘*Boden*’ (‘land’ or ‘soil’) as a part of Nazi ideology, rejecting its ideas of national belonging through the native’s attachment to the territory in favour of a nomadic, borderless poetics. In the Frankfurt Lecture, Bachmann’s comments about language and weapons then lead her to consider the poet’s relation to language. She observes: ‘We think we all know language like the backs of our hands; after all, we are constantly keeping company with it, but the writer does not; he cannot keep company with it’.¹⁴³ She goes on: ‘It frightens him; it is not transparent to him; of course it has an existence anterior to that of literature, active and preordained to serve a use that he can make no use of.’¹⁴⁴ Here, what Bachmann means by not “keeping company” with language is the necessary defamiliarization of language – an insistence on its non-transparency and its historicity, including its role in the formation of the ideology of the state.

Bachmann’s second lecture translated into English is “The Writing I”. In this lecture, Bachmann talks about how various writers use first-person narration by giving examples from Henry Miller, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Samuel Beckett. She begins, however, as in the first lecture, with

¹⁴² *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, ed. by Stephanie Barron (Los Angeles and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and H.N. Abrams, 1991).

¹⁴³ Douglas Robertson, *A Translation of "Das Schreibende Ich," a Lecture on the First-Person Narrator by Ingeborg Bachmann* (2017) <<http://shirtysleeves.blogspot.com/2017/10/a-translation-of-das-schreibende-ich.html>> [accessed 15 October 2020].

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

her own situation as a speaker in front of an audience: “‘I am speaking to you’: when I say this to an individual, it seems to be pretty clear which *I* is doing the talking here and what is meant by the sentence in which this *I* figures—in other words, pretty clear who is saying what here’.¹⁴⁵ As in that first lecture, Bachmann engages directly with the audience at the start. She goes on: ‘But once you are standing alone up here and saying “I am speaking to you” to a crowd of people down there, the “I” suddenly changes; it slips away from the speaker; it becomes formal and rhetorical.’¹⁴⁶ Having drawn this distinction between intimate and formal address, and the performativity of speech, she then explores different ways of using *I*: ‘When, in other words, you down there, a couple of hundred people—individuals, to be sure, in other settings, but right now very much a crowd—are intercepting an “I” that comes from some sky-high distance... In such a case, nothing is left but a sentence that is being carried to you over a loudspeaker or on a piece of paper, a book, or a stage, a sentence issuing from an *I* with no warranty.’¹⁴⁷ That reference to the ‘loudspeaker’ gestures towards the Nazi period, but she suggests that the public voice of politicians can be equally damaging in the written form of books, though it seems more innocent: ‘The *I* is unproblematic for us when a historical figure, a politician, for example, or a statesman or a military officer, turns up with his *I* in his memoirs.’¹⁴⁸ These two *I*’s, the performative *I* of memoirs and the performative *I* of the public speaker, are different instances, but, Bachmann argues, they both enforce positions of power, giving a sense of authority denied to the ‘I’ of the audience – the ‘individuals’ who make up ‘a crowd’. But the ‘writing-*I*’ on which Bachmann’s lecture focuses is different to a politician’s, whether in a memoir or a public speech, as she says: ‘The *I*-role as I have

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

attempted to describe it here is effectual in all literary works of this genre from antiquity to the present, from the noblest and highest-ranking of them down to the lowest-ranking and sleaziest.’¹⁴⁹ As Karen R. Achberger observes: ‘Her discussion of the possible narrative voices and personae available to an author is informed by a concern for the accountability and authority, the authenticity and reliability, of the person in the position of narrating the work.’¹⁵⁰

While political speakers and writers appeal to what I call in the introduction ‘cultural narratives’, often using them to justify racist and nationalist violence, Bachmann uses the ‘I’ of literature to open more complex ways of thinking about how the first-person performs different modes of identity. She continues: ‘It could be that: [the *I*] is composed of myriads of particles, and at the same time it seems as though *I* were a Nothing, the hypostasis of a pure form, something like a dreamed-up substance, something that designates a dreamed-up identity, a cipher for something that is harder to decipher than the most top-secret command. But of course there are such people as researchers and poets, who are indefatigable, who try to search out this *I*, to search into it, to found it and fathom it, and who are constantly driving it out of its mind.’¹⁵¹ Bachmann then gives examples from literature: ‘We can awestricken gape at such an *I*—i.e., such a rabid, neck-breaking attempt to spare oneself the entire concept of the *I*—in the books of Henry Miller. And better still in the work of the maverick of French literature, Louis Ferdinand Céline.’¹⁵² In contrast to the stable, powerful ‘I’ of political memoirs, Miller and Céline’s autobiographical texts, which deal with matters of sex, death and obscenity in a style that veers between the realistic and aspects of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Achberger, *Understanding Bachmann*, p.62.

¹⁵¹ Robertson, *A Translation of "Das Schreibende Ich," a Lecture on the First-Person Narrator by Ingeborg Bachmann*.

¹⁵² Ibid.

stream-of-consciousness description, prevent the reader from being subjected to what she calls 'the entire concept of the I'.¹⁵³ These attempts are 'rabid' and 'neck-breaking': they are not comfortable to read, but this discomfort is for Bachmann a usefully destabilizing experience.

Bachmann then talks about the *I* of a number of different authors, mainly fiction writers, such as Proust, Dostoyevsky, Beckett, by giving paragraph-long quotations from different texts.¹⁵⁴ She observes: 'Proust's *I* is every possible thing, but at all events even this *I*, as an instrument, is no enigma'.¹⁵⁵ By contrast, she suggests: 'Beckett's *I* loses itself in mutterings, and yet it is suspicious of its mutterings; nevertheless the needfulness of talking is still present—resignation, impossible.'¹⁵⁶ She goes on: 'Even if it has withdrawn from the world because it was violated, debased, and robbed of all its contents by that world, it cannot withdraw from itself, and in its meagreness and beggarliness it is still always a hero, the hero *I* with its immemorial heroism, that fortitude that remains invisible on its surface and is its greatest attribute.'¹⁵⁷ This "withdrawn" *I* that was 'violated, debased and robbed of all its contents by that world' in turn suggests a political dimension. Beckett's post-war novels were to some extent influenced by his time in the French Resistance, his personal experience of traumatic conflict as an anti-Fascist artist: texts such as *The*

¹⁵³ See for example Henry Miller, *Plexus*, Henry Miller, 1953, Olympia Press and Louis Ferdinand Celine, *Journey to the End of the Night*. Henry Miller, *Plexus* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1994), Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night*, trans. by Ralph Manheim, 2edn (New York, NY: New Directions, 2006).

¹⁵⁴ Bachmann quotes from Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead* and Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: The Way by Swann's*, ed. by Christopher Prendergast, trans. by Lydia Davis, 2 edn (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2003). Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead*, trans. by David McDuff (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 1986). Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, ed. by Steven Connor (London, UK: Faber & Faber, 2010).

¹⁵⁵ Robertson, *A Translation of "Das Schreibende Ich," a Lecture on the First-Person Narrator by Ingeborg Bachmann*.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

Unnameable present narrators ('the withdrawn I') who barely survive as subjects, hardly provided with names or even bodies, yet continuing to speak and write. As such, Bachmann suggests that the ellipses and omissions of modernist literature may provide ways of thinking through and coming to terms with historical trauma still only haltingly present in public discourse.

Bachmann concludes her lecture on the usage of the *I* with this extraordinary statement: 'It is the miracle of the *I* that whenever it speaks it lives; it cannot die—not even if it is defeated or in doubt, bereft of credibility and mutilated—this *I* with no warranty!'¹⁵⁸ For Bachman, even if 'nobody believes it, and if it does not believe itself, one must believe it, it must believe itself, as soon as it gets started, as soon as it begins to speak, breaks away from the uniform choir, from the closemouthed congregation, whoever it may be, whatever it may be. And it will enjoy its triumph, today as ever before and henceforth—as a placeholder of the human voice.'¹⁵⁹ This "I" that has "no warranty", that breaks away from the "uniform choir", is the same "I" that resists political oppression, and refuses to give in to despair. The "placeholder of the human voice" here could well be a gesture towards communality. Bachmann moves from the specific *I*'s of each author, which in some cases can be identified with the person who wrote the texts, and in some cases are mediated through fictional figures, to suggest that they all have in common 'the human voice'. While the political speaker or memoirist claims a similar generalizing – that they speak for *all* people within a certain group, and thus *against* others in different groups – Bachmann insists that 'the human voice' present in these writers' '*I*' is more open than theirs.

¹⁵⁸ Irmela von der Lühe, Maureen T. Kraus, "'I without Guarantees", Ingeborg Bachmann's Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics', *New German Critique*, .27, (1982), 31-55, p. 47.

¹⁵⁹ Robertson, *A Translation of "Das Schreibende Ich," a Lecture on the First-Person Narrator by Ingeborg Bachmann*.

Significantly, a number of the authors she discusses wrote in languages other than German, and, in Beckett's case, in his second language, French, as well as in English. Refusing to be limited by their national or linguistic identity, in not pretending to speak for everyone, they are more radically able to speak for a human experience that goes beyond languages and national boundaries.

‘I have scarcely stepped on your soul’: Land and the Nazi Past

Bachmann's first book, *Die gestundete Zeit (Borrowed Time)*, was published in 1953 and won a prestigious award from the Gruppe 47.¹⁶⁰ She also received a significant amount of attention from the public. As Mark Anderson wrote, in the introduction to his translations of Bachmann's poetry, *In The Storm of Roses*, ‘Rarely has a modern poet of serious rank been feted so early with such ceremony as was Ingeborg Bachmann’.¹⁶¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the poems in *Borrowed Time* are full of references to war, emerging from Bachmann's experience living through the Second World War in Austria, also chronicled in the posthumously-published *War Diaries*, and what she saw as the potential for Fascism to re-emerge, despite the end of the conflict.¹⁶² The first poem of the volume is “Journey Out”, which begins ‘smoke rises from the land’.¹⁶³ It continues with what seems to be a voyage out to sea, before describing how ‘The dark water, thousand-eyed, / opens its white-foamed lashes’.

¹⁶⁰ This is the name of the group of German writers, founded by the writer and publisher Hans-Werner Richter in 1947, which lasted until 1967. These writers were thinking of the political stance of writing and language's relationship to producing such texts at the time of Nazi Germany. Bachmann was one of the very few women who received an award with her book, even though, at the time, *Die gestundete Zeit* was unpublished. *The Feminist Encyclopedia of German Literature*, ed. by Friederike Ursula Eigler, Susanne Kord (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 224-225.

¹⁶¹ Ingeborg Bachmann, *In the Storm of Roses: Selected Poems by Ingeborg Bachmann*, trans. by Mark Anderson (Princeton, New Jersey: Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation, Princeton University Press, 1986), p.3.

¹⁶² *A History of Austrian Literature 1918-2000*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson, Katrin Kohl (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006).

¹⁶³ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.3.

The poem begins on the sea and, by the second page, the land has disappeared: ‘Of land there’s nothing more to be seen.’¹⁶⁴ This seems to be a positive move: the poem’s final stanza proclaims: ‘Best of all / is the work on ships / that sail far away [...] to lift the ship over the waves / towards the forever recurring shore of the sun.’¹⁶⁵ In this line, the sun itself has a ‘shore’ or is a ‘shore’, a figure for the horizon that will constantly move while the sun appears to be in a fixed position. This could indicate either sunrise or sunset: it emphasizes daily cycles, but also a desire for escape. Moving from one shore (that of land) to another (that of the sun), the poem creates and occupies an in-between space.

The apparent desire to escape land, or to move from one land to another, one shore to another, found in the book’s first poem, is continued in the second, ‘Departure from England’.¹⁶⁶ Starting with the line: ‘I have barely stepped upon your land’ and ending with ‘I have never stepped on its land.’ the poem is built on the image of the narrator leaving: ‘that I had already left you / the moment I set anchor.’¹⁶⁷ Though the poem refers specifically to England, it can also be read as a warning, from Bachmann to her readers, in post-war Germany. As Mark M. Anderson writes on the *Frankfurt Lectures*: ‘Two events that took place a few years after the lectures and that Bachmann imaginatively linked, seem to have served a catalyst decisive shift. The much-publicized Auschwitz trials of Nazi officials in the years 1963 to 1965 led Bachmann to read extensively in the medical and legal literature on the Holocaust.’¹⁶⁸ Unlike the ‘I’ of the political memoirist and public speaker, Bachmann’s eye rejects

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ *A New History of German Literature*, ed. by David E. Wellbery, Judith Ryan, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Anton Kaes, Joseph Leo Koerner, Dorothea E. von Mücke (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), p.882.

any ties to a national group or topographic space. Achberger writes on Bachmann: ‘She had heralded an approaching catastrophe and called her readers to swift and determined action, most frequently in the form of a departure by ship, as in “Leaving Port” “Abschied von England” (“Departure from England”)’.¹⁶⁹

“Land” is an important word and subject for Bachmann and is found repeatedly in her work. As we have just seen, ‘Departure from England’ opens: “*Ich habe deinen Boden kaum betreten, / schweigsames Land, kaum einen Stein berührt*” (‘I have scarcely trod your soil, / silent land, scarcely touched a stone’).¹⁷⁰ While this ‘land’ is sometimes allegorical or imaginary (as in the poem ‘Bohemia by the Sea’, which I will analyze in a later section), it also comes from and within a specific political context. The Nazi regime used the slogan ‘*Blut und Boden*’ (‘Blood and Soil’) to suggest the unity of racial identity (‘blood’) and national territory or land (‘soil’). While they also pursued territorial expansions into Eastern Europe (expressed through the term ‘*lebensraum*’, or ‘living space’), they also sought to create an idealized image of Aryan peasant life, rooted to the soil, that they contrasted with the anti-Semitic caricature of the ‘rootless’, nomadic ‘wandering Jew’, who had no connection to the land.¹⁷¹ Bachmann’s insistence on moving beyond borders – a poetic nomadism – can itself be seen as an anti-Fascist counter to such ideology, and her insistence that ‘I have scarcely trod your soil’ suggests that she rejects connection to land if it connects to the violence and racism of myths of national identity.

¹⁶⁹ Achberger, *Understanding Bachmann*, p.16.

¹⁷⁰ Filkins translates ‘Boden’ as ‘land’ and ‘Land’ as ‘country’; Anderson’s ‘soil’ and ‘land’ are perhaps closer to the original, and retain this important political connotation. Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.7.

¹⁷¹ Alain Badiou, Ivan Segré, Éric Hazan, *Reflections On Anti-Semitism*, trans. by David Fernbach (London, UK: Verso, 2012).

During the 1930s and 1940s, Bachmann witnessed fascism in Austria first hand: her father joined the Austrian Nazi party in 1932.¹⁷² She later connects Nazism to nightmares of a father figure in her novel *Malina*.¹⁷³ While her critique of Nazism led her to embrace a left wing, anti-fascist position, she was later criticized for being insufficiently political in her work. Bachmann's gender arguably played a role in this.¹⁷⁴ In 1982, Bachmann presented a copy of her first book of poetry to the influential Marxist writer Bertolt Brecht, then residing in East Germany, who "corrected" her work by making visibly more political suggestions.¹⁷⁵

Combined with her lack of support for the policies of the Austrian and German post-war government, Bachmann's work often expressed a feeling of powerlessness. Sara Lennox wrote on Bachmann's position: 'She hated and condemned the political course that Austria and Germany had taken but, as a member of a generation before the emergence of the student movement and the second wave of feminism, felt powerless to influence the direction of political events'.¹⁷⁶ In the title poem to her 1953 collection, "*Borrowed Time*" (an alternative translation would be "*Mortgaged Time*"), Bachmann writes: 'Harder days are coming. / The loan of borrowed time/ will be due on the horizon.'¹⁷⁷ What Bachmann indirectly refers to here is the 1948 American Marshall Plan, which provided massive loans to Western European countries affiliated with America in the Cold War.¹⁷⁸ While the Plan was supposed to

¹⁷² Lennox, *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann*, p. 330.

¹⁷³ Michaela M. Grobbel, *Enacting Past and Present: The Memory Theaters of Djuna Barnes, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Marguerite Duras* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

¹⁷⁴ See Karen R. Achberger, ' "Kunst als Veränderndes": Bachmann and Brecht', *Monatshefte*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp.7-16.

¹⁷⁵ Lennox. *The Cemetery Of The Murdered Daughters*, p.143.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.21.

¹⁷⁸ *The Marshall Plan and the Shaping of American Strategy*, ed. by Bruce D. Jones (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

help rebuild economies that had been devastated by the Second World War, it also tied them to America through debt in order to ensure that they would take its side as part of an anti-communist 'West' against Soviet-affiliated countries. Rather than resolving the traumas of history and allowing Germany and Austria to move on from the past, it created further problems that would soon emerge.¹⁷⁹ In particular, it allowed German-speaking countries to argue prematurely that they had moved on from the Nazi past, combining economic recovery with a sense that German culture could be rehabilitated. Indeed, Bachmann herself featured on the cover of *Die Spiegel* in 1954 'as a poet whose accomplishment proved that Germany could once more compete on the stage of world literature'.¹⁸⁰ However, the 1963-65 Auschwitz trials had an unforeseen impact on German society. According to Peter Weiss, who attended the Auschwitz trials of 1964, the trials paradoxically caused an unwillingness to engage with guilt.¹⁸¹ It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that a younger generation in West Germany confronted this past, culminating in films like *Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter*, directed by Helma Sanders-Brahms in 1980.¹⁸² David Art wrote: 'During the 1960s, many West Germans began to call for a "cultural strategy" of dealing with the Nazi past that demanded a critical confrontation with the political ideas that had preceded, flourished under, and survived Nazism.'¹⁸³ Despite 'De-Nazification' policies implemented by the Americans in these countries in 1945, former Nazis still held positions of power.¹⁸⁴ Some of the former German Nazis

¹⁷⁹ *The Marshall Plan in Austria: Vol 8*, ed. by Anton Pelinka, Günter Bischof, Dieter Stiefel, 2 edn (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁸⁰ Lennox, *Cemetery Of The Murdered Daughters Feminism, History, And Ingeborg Bachmann*, p.32.

¹⁸¹ *Re-examining the Holocaust Through Literature*, ed. by Benn E. Williams, Aukje Kluge (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), p.33.

¹⁸² East Germany, of course, has a different history in relation to this.

¹⁸³ David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.19.

¹⁸⁴ Von Ralf Beste, Georg Bönisch, Thomas Darnstaedt, Jan Friedmann, Michael Fröhlingsdorf, Klaus Wiegrefe, 'The Role Ex-Nazis Played in Early West Germany', *Der Spiegel*, 6 March 2012.

moved to the US, most notably to work in the military-industrial complex.¹⁸⁵ De-Nazification was abolished in 1951, with numerous officials who had been removed from their jobs reinstated, and thousands of former Nazis, including SS guards who had been convicted of murder and participation in jails and camps, pardoned.¹⁸⁶ Many people concealed their involvement with the Nazi Party, including the well-known author Günter Grass, who revealed his past as a former member of the Hitler Youth only at the end of his life.¹⁸⁷ Bachmann's 'borrowed time' suggests that what is happening today will have consequences tomorrow, like the time borrowed, that will need to be paid back: this included both the debt to America and the moral 'debt' of the Nazi past. As Frederick Garber observes:

If our time is "mortgaged", that means we have not yet paid for it. Mortgaged time is time for which we are still in debt, not yet redeemed. Bachmann makes much of the endemic play of meaning in terms like "mortgaged" and "redeemed."¹⁸⁸

Although the Marshall plan meant that there was a literal mortgaging of time, for Bachmann the "mortgage" that is yet to be paid also refers to the guilt of the Nazi past, as something still unresolved.

As we saw in the first section of this chapter, for Bachmann, literary language could challenge the weaponization and militarization of language. We saw how Bachmann

¹⁸⁵ Robert A. Rosenbaum, *Waking to Danger: Americans and Nazi Germany, 1933-1941* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), p.70.

¹⁸⁶ *Collaboration with the Nazis: Public Discourse After the Holocaust*, ed. by Roni Stauber (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), p.78.

¹⁸⁷ Alan Riding, 'Günter Grass Under Siege After Revealing SS Past', *The New York Times*, August 17, 2006.

¹⁸⁸ Gisela Brinker-Gabler, Markus Zisselsberger, *If We Had The Word: Ingeborg Bachmann, Views and Reviews* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2004), p.36.

suggested that the ‘writing-I’ of literature could provide collective alternatives to the individual authority placed in politicians’ hate speech. The multiple and multi-layered nature of the *I* in novels by Miller, Celine and Beckett challenges the univocal I of the politician and forces critical attention. While the writing-I of politicians often expresses its hateful ideology openly, the silence about the Nazi past draws attention to what is not said. In this section, I have discussed Bachmann’s use of the figures of land and debt to talk about the Nazi past, to suggest that she uses poetry to approach topics that had been previously suppressed, from public discourse. In the following section I will explore this question further, beginning with Bachmann’s writing on names and that which cannot be named, and then moving on to her writing on the ‘unspeakable’. As I have suggested, Bachmann believes that poetry can challenge political silence and the unacknowledged ‘debt’ of the historical past. However, as I will go on to argue, she also believes that certain experiences—particularly historical trauma—are fundamentally inexpressible, and cannot be translated into language. Nazism is ‘unspeakable’, both because of the political climate of silence in which no one speaks about it, and because of the horrors it performed. Bachmann asks the question: how can poetry name the nameless and speak the unspeakable?

Names and the Unspeakable

Before turning to Bachmann’s writing on the unspeakable, I will address her writing on names. Having addressed the writing-I in her first lecture, Bachmann’s fourth Frankfurt lecture ends by invoking Proust on the subject of names:

He has said whatever can be said about names, and he has worked on them from two directions: he has enthroned names, bathed them in the light of a magic lantern, then destroyed them and blotted them out; he has suffused them, laden them, with significance, and has at the same time demonstrated their emptiness, thrown them away like so many empty husks, stigmatized them as an arrogation of a singularity.¹⁸⁹

For Bachmann, no single approach to names will work. Proust both ‘enthrones’ and ‘destroys’ names; he has both ‘laden them, with significance’ and ‘demonstrated their emptiness’. Similar to the destabilization of the ‘writing-I’ discussed earlier in the chapter, literary language challenges fixed meaning while nonetheless searching for clarity and truth.¹⁹⁰ In that sense, poetry’s naming is importantly a questioning, and this is one way of speaking, even as it cannot correct all the errors of historical erasure and the inability to describe states of being.

The problem of names appears in “The Bridges”, where Bachmann wrote: ‘Pont Mirabeau... Waterloo Bridge.../ How can the names stand/ to carry the nameless?’¹⁹¹ The lines seem to be referring both to the ‘nameless’ people who cross the bridges and to the histories that the names of the different bridges, in Paris and London, contain. People might cross a bridge every day to go to work, but bridges are also important as memorials of a time of war. On June 28, 1815, the English and Prussians defeated Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo, which the English bridge is named after.

¹⁸⁹ Douglas Robertson, *A Translation of "Der Umgang mit Namen," a Lecture on Names by Ingeborg Bachmann* (2017)

<<http://shirtysleeves.blogspot.com/search/label/Frankfurter%20Vorlesungen?updated-max=2018-02-23T18:05:00-05:00&max-results=20&start=2&by-date=false>> [accessed 15 October 2020].

¹⁹⁰ Ingeborg Bachman gave a speech titled “People Can Be Expected To Know The Truth” in 1959 after accepting the Radio Play Prize for the War Blind. Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*, p.64.

¹⁹¹ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.47.

¹⁹² There is thus a history of inter-European militarism and violence implicit in the very name. Pont Mirabeau has a different relation to war. In 1944, Pont Mirabeau had been the scene of fighting between Allied Forces and the Nazis during the Second World War: while the Allied Forces captured the bridge, many lives were lost.¹⁹³ The Count of Mirabeau (1749-91), after whom the bridge was named, was a leader in the early stages of the French Revolution. It later turned out that he was in the pay of Louis XIV and the Austrian enemies of France. Pont Mirabeau thus subtends a complex relation to history.

In more literary terms, the Pont Mirabeau was the subject of a famous poem by Apollinaire about the sorrows of love.

Love goes away the way this water flows

Love goes away [...]

Days and weeks drift past like rain

Neither time past

Nor our loves come back again

Beneath the Pont Mirabeau flows the Seine¹⁹⁴

In her poem, Bachmann develops a paradox: names carry the nameless. Similarly, the bridge is in a fixed position while the water in the river is always moving. For

¹⁹² John Hamilton, *Battle of Waterloo* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: ABDO Publishing Company, 2014), pp.18-19.

¹⁹³ Raymond Geuss, *Politics and the Imagination* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), p.118.

¹⁹⁴ For more on the relation between Bachmann and Apollinaire see Sabine Golz's essay in *Bachmann: Views and Reviews*. (Brinker-Gabler, Zisselsberger, *If We Had The Word: Ingeborg Bachmann, Views and Reviews*) Guillaume Apollinaire, *Zone: Selected Poems*, trans. by Ron Padgett (New York, NY: NYRB, 2015), p.17.

Apollinaire, this is a figure for the passing of time and the loss of love.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, the ‘transience’ of experience in Bachman’s poem links to Apollinaire’s ‘Love’ which ‘goes away’. When even what is visible hides secrets, the ‘dream’ – figured metaphorically as a bridge which ‘arches’ – is inadequate support. In Bachmann’s lines, ‘How can the names stand / to carry the nameless’ names carry the nameless, but these nameless people are simply the bearers of names that are lost from the historical record, like the joys and sorrows of love that cannot be expressed in words.

This said, bridges also form connections between different geographical locations and have been used in Modernist writing to suggest spaces of possibility and renewal, as in Hart Crane’s poem *The Bridge* (1923), written for the Brooklyn Bridge in New York, which is important for connecting the Manhattan and Brooklyn parts of the city.¹⁹⁶ Significantly, Bachmann’s poem ends with the figure of an ‘official’ who will ‘cut the ribbon’ for a new bridge:

For when he does, he’ll seize the sun’s scissors
within the fog, and if the sun blinds him,
he’ll be swallowed by fog when he falls.¹⁹⁷

Instead of crossing the bridge, she suggests, ‘it’s better to follow the riverbanks, / crossing from one to another’, avoiding fixed topographic positions and inadequate names.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Timothy Mathews, *Reading Apollinaire: Theories of Poetic Language* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1987).

¹⁹⁶ Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane’s View From the Bridge* (2017) <<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/11/24/hart-cranes-view-from-the-bridge/>> [accessed 15 October 2020].

¹⁹⁷ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.47.

For Bachmann, the ‘debts’ of the Marshall Plan and of West Germany and Austria’s failure to deal with their Nazi past in the 1950s were inseparable from the German language.¹⁹⁹ The horrors of the Holocaust and the continuing presence of Nazis in positions of power could not be spoken easily. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Bachmann’s doctoral thesis on Heidegger, a philosopher whose support for the Nazis is still being revealed and reckoned with (see, for example, the recent publication of his ‘Black Notebooks’), ends by critiquing his work, arguing that philosophy cannot, as Heidegger argued, make claims to truth.²⁰⁰ Bachmann instead turned to Wittgenstein. Fascinated by Wittgenstein’s statement ‘Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent’, Bachmann delivered a radio essay on Wittgenstein entitled ‘The Sayable and the Unsayable’ which she wrote in 1953 and broadcast the year after.²⁰¹ Here she argued that ‘there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest’. While these “things” are “mystical” and “unsayable”, for Bachmann, poetry is a way that they can “make themselves manifest” in language, as the nature of poetry, as well as other art forms, is to reveal human emotions and thoughts that are difficult to express otherwise. Thus, Bachmann’s Ph.D. dissertation concludes with lines from Baudelaire’s ‘*Le gouffre*’ (*The Abyss*), which she cites as “linguistic evidence of the extreme possibility of

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Eva B. Revesz, 'Poetry after Auschwitz: Tracing Trauma in Ingeborg Bachmann's Lyric Work', *Monatshefte*, 99.2, (2007), pp.194-216.

²⁰⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Ponderings II–VI: Black Notebooks 1931–1938*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz, 2 edn (Indiana, United States: Indiana University Press, 2016). See *The Banality of Heidegger* by Jean-Luc Nancy for the current state of discussion. Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*, p.59.

²⁰¹ Alfred Nordmann, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.154. See also Georgette Fleischer, 'Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* (1971): Wittgensteinian Poetics out of the Austrian National Socialist Past', *HOW2*, 1.3, (2000), in <https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_3_2000/current/readings/fleischer.html#4> [accessed 15 October 2020].

expressing the ineffable”.²⁰² For Bachmann, we see this uneasiness of expressing oneself especially in Baudelaire’s lines: ‘Above, below, around me, shores descending... / Silence, frightful... captivating Space.’²⁰³

The possibility of speaking the unspeakable was one of the main questions that preoccupied Bachmann’s poetry in the 1950s. Many times she references “the unspeakable” in her poems, often in reference to the political situation she was placed in, geographically and intellectually, reckoning with the legacy of Nazism in Austria and Germany. Thus, in her poem “Early Noon”, Bachmann talks about this different kind of “unspeakable”, the one that has not been spoken about enough: ‘The unspeakable passes, barely spoken, over the / land: already it’s noon’.²⁰⁴ This poem refers directly to the end of the Second World War in 1945: ‘Where Germany’s sky blackens the earth, / its beheaded angel seeks a grave for hate. // Seven years later / it occurs to you again [...] and your eyes fill with tears’.²⁰⁵ Bachmann suggests that part of the problem is Nazi officials still being in power discussed above: ‘Seven years later, / inside a mortuary, / the hangmen of yesterday / drain the golden cup. / Your eyes lower in shame’.²⁰⁶ In relation to this, Bachmann references the traditional symbol of the eagle, which had been contaminated by its association with the Nazis, but remained in use in West Germany: ‘onto the cliff / of the ancient dream the eagle is welded, / remaining forever’.²⁰⁷ She instructs the reader to ‘throw off its shackles, help it / down the slope’, as the poetry seeks to name this danger: ‘When Germany’s

²⁰² See Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*, pp. 59-60

²⁰³ Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil: A Selection*, ed. by Marthiel Mathews, Jackson Mathews, trans. by Christopher Mattison (New York, NY: New Directions, 1955), pp.235-236.

²⁰⁴ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.35.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. ‘Hangmen’ alludes to Reinhard Heyndrich, who was known as the ‘Hangman of Prague’.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

earth blackens the sky, / a cloud seeks words and fills the crater with silence'.²⁰⁸

Words are sought, but the search ends in silence, and 'the unspeakable passes, barely spoken, over the land'.²⁰⁹

In contrast, there is the hope, in the later "Spoken and Rumored", from Bachmann's second collection: 'Word, remain for us/ composed of tender patience/ and impatience. This sowing/ must come to an end!'²¹⁰ Opposing the 'word, the one that sows the dragon', Bachmann insists that 'the beasts will not be caught by the one who mimics its call', but, instead, asks for: 'Word, be that part of us / enlightened, clear and beautiful'.²¹¹ Because 'we battle so much evil', she ends: 'Deliver me, my word!'²¹² Significantly, however, this 'word' is not named – in referring to this 'word', Bachmann could not say what that word will be, as it is not possible. Likewise, while we can read the poem as, once again, alluding to the Nazi regime and its different legacies in Austria, and Germany, her mythic references to 'the beast' and 'the dragon', combined with her reference to 'an end [that] must come', most obviously suggests the story of Cadmus and Athena in Greek mythology.²¹³ It also has overtones of the Biblical Apocalypse, which is, significantly, a revealing of what has previously been hidden, but which can only emerge through divine intervention.²¹⁴ The poem removes the agency for the true word to a mystical sphere. As we shall see, however, in the final section of this chapter, this sphere helps to

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Uilleam Blacker, *Memory, the City and the Legacy of World War II in East Central Europe: The Ghosts of Others* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2019), Caroline Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust* (London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

²¹⁴ The Greek "Apocalypse" (ἀποκάλυψις) means "revelation", "an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling". "apocalypse, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/9229. Accessed 21 October 2020.

avoid the ties to physical land used to justify the Nazi '*Blud und Bloden*' ideology, reclaiming the space of poetry as an alternative, imaginary and imaginative topography that challenges cultural narratives and allows space for hope.

'The Land of My Choice': Borders and Hope

In writing about Bachmann's use of the word "unspeakable", "*Das Unsagliche*", Peter Filkins, the English language translator of her poetry, touches on a border, namely that quality or state which exists between two states – between the immediate and the unknown, between the present and the past, between life and death itself.²¹⁵ While this suggests, in relation to Bachmann's poem, that this 'border' is partly a philosophical one, it is also helpful to bring in the literal borders in Bachmann's life. As she has noted, Bachmann lived in between borders. She spent her childhood in Carinthia in the south of Austria, and she likened this geographical location to a linguistic condition, between different languages, cultures and nationalities.²¹⁶

I spent my childhood in Carinthia, in the South, on the border, in a valley that had two names - one German and the other Slovenian. And the house in which for generations my ancestors had lived - both Austrians and Wends - still bears a name that sounds foreign. Hence, near the border there is still another border: the border of speech [...]²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.18.

²¹⁶ *A Companion to Border Studies*, ed. by Thomas M. Wilson, Hastings Donnan (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley - Blackwell, 2012).

²¹⁷ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.21.

As Filkins observes, ‘From the start, “the border of speech” was Bachmann’s “native land”’.²¹⁸ He describes this ‘native land’ as ‘a realm that lay both within and beyond the multilingual state of that actual border, and that actual house, which in itself represents a microcosm of the “house” of Austria and its past.’²¹⁹ In “Native Land,” Bachmann writes”: ‘Into my native land, into the South, / I moved and found, naked and poor/ and up to their waists in the sea, / a town and fortress.’²²⁰ Through personification, Bachmann connects the town and fortress with the ‘naked and poor’ humans whose lives they dominate. In doing so, she de-familiarizes the questions of ‘dwelling’ and ‘native land’ – which, as we have seen, in Nazi ideology, led to a notion of racial purity and national belonging tied to the land – suggesting, instead, that topography is constructed through social and political conditions as much as it is a ‘natural’ feature. In addition, Bachmann’s suggestion that she ‘moved’ into her native land suggests that she was never permanently rooted there. While ‘native’ normally suggests that one is born in a particular place and that is thus ‘yours’, moving into a place suggests that one was originally located somewhere else. She imparts a nomadic state into the native land, reconstructing it through her radical topography. Through challenging the linguistic associations of the ‘native land’, Bachmann is able to rename it and achieve clarity: ‘I opened my eyes to see. / Then life fell to me’.²²¹

Compared to her first volume, *Borrowed Time*, Ingeborg Bachmann’s poetry shows some significant changes by the time of her second collection *Invocation of the Great*

²¹⁸ Brinker-Gabler, Zisselsberger, *If We Had The Word: Ingeborg Bachmann, Views and Reviews*, p.19

²¹⁹ Ibid. Filkins here is quoting from Mark Anderson, ‘Death Ariaas in Vienna’, afterword to *Malina*. Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina*, trans. by Philip Boehm (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier, 1990).

²²⁰ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.181.

²²¹ Ibid.

Bear (1956).²²² For a start, more voices are in play. We can see this in her poem “Advertisement”: ‘But where are we going/ *carefree be carefree*/ when it is dark and when it grows cold/ *be carefree*/ but/ *with music*/ what should we do/ *cheerful and with music*/ and think’.²²³ Here, two voices are visibly present in the poem: one represented in italics. The speaker is perhaps asking “where are we going” to an inner voice, while the inner voice of the speaker responds to calm the speaker, saying “carefree be carefree”. However, Reingard Nethersole offers another interpretation of this poem: ‘The poem based on a question and answer dynamic intercepts two discourses, namely one of a search for meaning and another, printed in italics, belonging to the world of advertising.’²²⁴ Yet this is not so much a case of dialogue as of two voices speaking over or across one another in the poem. The ‘search for meaning’, which we have discussed in relation to the speakable and the unspeakable, names and the nameless, is left up in the air. These two discourses are questions and answers which do not resolve. The answers that are offered are not satisfactory, and the poem ends with an unanswered question: ‘but what happens / *best of all* / when dead silence // sets in’.²²⁵

In her condition of being between countries, between physical and linguistic borders, Bachmann emphasizes the importance of being on the edge, refusing a stable national identity. This idea often appears in her poems through the figure of spaces between land and sea, or land and rivers. In ‘The Bridges’, discussed above, the speaker argues that we should avoid bridges and instead proceed by the shore: ‘Lonely are all bridges

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ *German and European Poetics After the Holocaust: Crisis and Creativity*, ed. by Gert Hofmann, Marko Pajević, Michael Shields, Rachel Magshamhain (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), p.149.

²²⁵ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.171.

[...] It's better to follow the riverbanks, / crossing from one to another'.²²⁶ This seems to be an impossible proposal: how can we cross from one riverbank to the other without bridges? The poem exists in a state of uncertainty which offers little concrete solution to the problems it suggests. But in her second collection, Bachmann treats these issues with playfulness and more positivity, emphasizing utopian spaces, spaces of fluidity, theatricality and performance. We see this in her poem "Bohemia Lies By The Sea":

If a word here borders on me, I'll let it border.
If Bohemia still lies by the sea, I'll believe in the sea again.
And believing in the sea, thus I can hope for land.²²⁷

The poem picks up on the stage directions from Act III, Scene III of Shakespeare's comedy *The Winter's Tale*, which famously describe the land-locked Bohemia as bordering the sea: 'Bohemia. A desert country near the sea.' The poem continues this reference in subsequent lines, likewise alluding to the settings of other Shakespearian comedies:

Come here, all you Bohemians, seafarers, dock whores, and ships
unanchored. Don't you want to be Bohemians, all you Illyrians,
Veronese and Venetians. Play the comedies that make us laugh.²²⁸

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid. On the aforementioned settings of Shakespearian comedies, see Kenneth Meyer Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1991). and Murray J. Levith, *Shakespeare's Italian Settings and Plays* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

Ports and the sea are associated with borders, and, like the bridges that cross rivers in Bachmann's earlier poetry, are thus places of danger, threatened with destruction. As Painitz argues: "A sense of uncertainty infuses these lines [...], as everything seems to be in flux. While Bohemia *still* lies at the ocean, it might not remain there for much longer."²²⁹ In both 'The Bridges' and 'Bohemia Lies by the Sea', however, her curiosity enables Bachmann to retain hope in precarious spaces: 'Stirred by the lost / that faith could not carry, / the river's drumbeat awakens' ('The Bridges'); 'Play the comedies that makes us laugh [...] And err a hundred times, / as I erred and never withstood the trials, / though I did withstand them time after time' ('Bohemia'). In this instance, Bachmann finds the state of fluidity that Filkins describes as a space of hope. Here Bachmann emphasizes the fluidity that is to be found in ports in a positive light. Ports are places where people pass through – places of travel and trade. Different languages are spoken, different identities can be assumed. Through the references to Shakespeare and to acting ('the comedies that make us laugh'), Bachmann's poetry emphasizes performance and theatricality, and, by this means, the fluidity of identity. As with her reclamation of the 'native land' as a space of movement rather than fixed, national belonging, Bachmann constructs a radical poetic topography, an elsewhere, which is the only land she will call her own. 'Bohemia by the Sea' concludes:

As Bohemia withstood [the trials] and one fine day
was released to the sea [...]

I still border on a word and another land,

²²⁹*Germany and the Imagined East*, ed. by Lee M. Roberts (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), pp.24-25.

I border, like little else, on everything more and more,

a Bohemian, a wandering minstrel, who has nothing, who

is held by nothing, gifted only at seeing, by a doubtful sea,

the land of my choice.²³⁰

In the next chapter, I will examine the work of Sevim Burak, whose work, similarly to Bachmann's, challenges models of topography and cultural narrative, crossing borders and genres and challenging expectations of language and cultural and gendered identity.

²³⁰ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.617.

CHAPTER THREE.

‘WE ARE THE DEAD’:

THE WORK OF SEVİM BURAK



Illustration V – ‘The modelling years’, Sevim Burak, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p. 81

‘Outstanding’, ‘Freaky’, ‘Way Out’, ‘Extraordinary’, ‘Marginal’, ‘Uncommon’, ‘Out of Turn’, ‘Out of Sequence’, ‘Out of Ranks’: these are the words that one comes across when researching Sevim Burak, a figure whose work still defies categorisation.²³¹ Sevim Burak (1931 – 1983) was a Turkish author, a fashion model, and a designer, who was born in Istanbul. Her most famous works published in her lifetime include the volumes of short stories *Burnt Palaces* (1965) [*Yanık Saraylar*] and *African Dance* (1982) [*Afrika Dansı*]. The unfinished novel *Ford Mach I* (2003), short story *Ruşen the Clown* [*Palyaço Ruşen*], and the plays *Everest My Lord* and *Here is the Head, Here is the Body, Here are the Wings* (1984) [*İşte baş, İşte Gövde,*

²³¹ Murat Yalçın , 'Alışılmadık, Yeni, Yabancı, Adam Yayıncılık', *Notos Öykü*, .65, (2017), pp.32-34.

İşte Kanatlar] were published only after her death. From these, *Everest My Lord* and *Ford Mach I* have recently been adapted to the stage in Istanbul and Izmir.²³²

As a writer, Sevim Burak gained a reputation due to her idiosyncratic writing style, which marked her out from her contemporaries in Turkish literature. While experimental writers like the novelist Oğuz Atay, fiction writers such as Bilge Karasu, Leyla Erbil, Vüs'at O. Bener, and the İkinci Yeni poets (Ece Ayhan, İlhan Berk, Edip Cansever and others) also produced influential work from the 1950s onwards, as part of a flourishing of Turkish modernism, they all wrote within recognizable generic forms: novels, poems and short stories.²³³ By contrast, Burak refuses to write in one genre – her works can be read as plays, novels and poems all at the same time – and uses capitalized words, frequent repetition, narrative description and surreal juxtaposition to destabilize generic expectations. As critic Nilüfer Güngörmüş writes:

In her first book *Burnt Palaces* she used the language of the Old Testament in her writing. In her later work she continued to wander between different languages. She found new sources for herself: a French-Turkish dictionary, rules of etiquette and liqueur recipes, religious maxims, annotated prayer books, classified advertisements, advertising copies, writing on trucks, medical reports.

Furthermore, as Güngörmüş goes on to observe:

²³² *His Master's Voice (Sahibinin Sesi)*, Istanbul Theatre Festival, December 2, 2018. *Here is the Head, Here is the Body, Here are the Wings (İşte Baş, İşte Gövde, İşte Kanatlar)*, Terminal Stage, Izmir, December 25, 2017.

²³³ See the English translations of: Oğuz Atay, *The Disconnected*, trans. by Sevin Seydi (London, UK: Olric Press, 2017). Bilge Karasu, *Death In Troy*, trans. by Aron Aji (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Publishers, 2002). Bilge Karasu, *Night*, trans. by Güneli Gün, 2 edn (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1994). İlhan Berk, *Madrigals*, trans. by George Messo (Exeter, UK: Shearsman Books, 2008). İlhan Berk, *The Book of Things*, trans. by George Messo, 2 edn (Exeter, UK: Shearsman Books, 2016). Ece Ayhan, *A Blind Cat Black and The Orthodoxies*, trans. by Murat Nemet-Nejat, 2 edn (Los Angeles, CA: Green Integer, 2005).

She did not confine her exploration to linguistic expression. She expanded the correlation established between text and picture in *Burnt Palaces* in later texts. When necessary to convey meaning, she abandoned the written for visual language.²³⁴

Because of this, Turkish readers often did not understand her work, or even if they believed they had done so, misunderstood it. As a result, as Güngörmüş observes: ‘Sevim Burak continues to surprise people today, as she did before...Sevim Burak is even more outstanding than the outstanding in our literature.’²³⁵

As this suggests, Burak’s work is characterized by a denial of ‘meaning’ and ‘storyline’; it is shaped around linguistic and stylistic gestures such as bursts of repetition, extensive lists, or surreal moments in which the boundaries between human and non-human, subject and environment become blurred. We see an example of her denial of meaning and stylistic gestures in the following passage from *Everest My Lord*, which she described as both a ‘three-act novel’ and ‘my new poem which starts from scratch, reconstructing with words and letters [...] a linguistic study’.²³⁶

SANDALYE

DÜŞÜNÜR

KOLTUK

DÜŞÜNÜR

KOLTUK KOLU

DÜŞÜNÜR

SON BİR SUAL

²³⁴ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.100.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

NEDEN D Ü S Ü N Ü Y O R U Z?

CHAIR

THINKS

EASY CHAIR

THINKS

CHAIR ARM

THINKS

ONE LAST QUESTION

WHY DO WE T H I N K? ²³⁷

In this example, an inanimate object is personified within the domestic sphere and the distinction between thinking person and object becomes blurred. Burak was always interested in challenging normative expectations associated with domestic and other spaces, but here she also questions the distance between thinking subjects and objects.

In an interview from 1965, Burak discusses her first, unpublished short story, written when she was just twelve years old. In this story, a girl disguises herself as a boy, and says to another girl (who, for Burak, represents the writer):

Bu güleryüzlü ve neş'eli delikanlıya iyi bakın, o'nu ılerde bulamayacaksınız, o bilhassa kendini hiç belli etmiyor.

Take a good look at this smiley-faced and happy young man, because you won't be able to find him anymore, *he is hiding himself on purpose.* ²³⁸

²³⁷ Ibid. Where possible, I have used the translations (by Mary Işin and Emine Mizyal) in Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, Other translations are my own and are indicated in the text.

For Burak, this story, and this particular quotation, marks the beginning of her writing, suggesting the questions of disguise and performance that preoccupy her throughout her work. This early experimentation with gender identity indicates the way her writing plays with expected roles, performances and narratives. The ‘happy young man’, who is in fact biologically gendered female, is performing an identity, ‘hiding himself on purpose’. Rejecting conventional expectations of gender, this performance is a way of channelling different identities, and fusing them to form the text.²³⁹ This space of disguise, blurred identities and hybridity is a space of both alienation and freedom, which for Burak is fundamentally connected to the mysterious and difficult practice of writing itself.

In an article in *Yeni Dergi* in 1966, Burak describes her own writing practice by saying: ‘I risk everything for writing – to become alienated by the others, long sleepless nights, awakenings. It all starts with the first sentence. When I hear the first sentence in my head I follow it, making sure that it goes somewhere. Perhaps this is why sometimes my stories read as poems: because I have infinite belief in that first sentence.’²⁴⁰ We can see the poetic aspect of Burak’s stories, most clearly in her first published book, *Burnt Palaces*. The story concerns a typist who invents an aristocratic past, imagining (with reference to the story of Moses in the Old Testament), that she was put in a basket and left to float down a river until taken in by her Aunt Fulya. Aunt Fulya’s house burns down, leaving the protagonist with nothing

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ The most extreme example of Burak’s experimentation of narrative comes in her unfinished novel *Ford Mach I*, where she fuses with an automobile, which is also her antagonist. I will return to this below.

²⁴⁰ Sevim Burak, ‘Yanık Saraylar - Demir Özlü’ye Cevap, Hikâye ya da İmge ya da Tansık’, *Yeni Dergi*, .19, (1966), pp.300-305. My translation.

but dreams. Significantly, the reference to the Biblical story of Moses links to Jewishness, while the text's invention of alternative genealogies in this story, which relates to Burak's anxiety over her mother's Jewishness, both addresses and disguises autobiography. She writes in a letter: 'When I was a little girl I thought I was better than anyone else, now it's the opposite. I'd be ashamed of my mom, of Jewish people. My mom would cry, and would always say that I'll cry one day... Now a few Jewish people, and a couple of houses are all there is left for me from my parents. That is why I wrote Jehovah.'²⁴¹ I will return to the question of Jewishness below, but for the present, I wish to focus on the text's formal experimentation. At one point in the text, we find the following:

THEY CAME...

They were very tired

They lined up at the beginning of the street.

They were eight, or ten people.

After them a woman showed up.

They were walking slowly, and because of that it took a long time for them to line up.

Their feet were naked.

They kneeled in front of the man.

Then suddenly their hands and knees stopped moving.²⁴²

Here we see Burak playing with narrative elements: we are offered a list of descriptions and actions, which appears to offer clarity – we find out that 'their feet were naked' and that 'they kneeled in front of the man' – but the descriptions are

²⁴¹ Sevim Burak, *Beni Deliler Anlar*, ed. by A. Karaca Borar (İstanbul: Hayy Kitap, 2009), p.27. My translation.

²⁴² Sevim Burak, *Yanık Saraylar*, 13 edn (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2020), p.7. My translation.

deliberately left vague. Even the number of people is unclear – ‘they were eight, or ten people’ – and, though the statements accumulate, we do not know who these people are or why they are on the street. Burak’s narrative framing suggests prose, but she challenges this expectation through what seems to be poetic lineation.

Burak’s use of capitalised words and line breaks in what seem to be prose texts is uncommon in modern Turkish literature. As Güngörmüş notes:

Sevim Burak’s style of writing is one that seems more suitable to poets. Rhythm has a great meaning in her narrative. Meaning is created from diffusion. One of the elements bringing this diffusion together is rhythm.²⁴³

Güngörmüş’s word ‘diffusion’ suggests that a single ideational source is spread across the text. Here, as we have seen, the narrative event and the identity of the characters is rendered deliberately vague. The reader has to work actively to piece together the meaning, constructing their own imaginary scene from the slight clues that Burak has provided. As Güngörmüş suggests, rhythm is important to Burak’s work: she plays with the rhythms of the Turkish language, which cannot be adequately rendered in English translation. At the same time, Burak travelled widely across Europe and Africa, and she also uses words from languages other than Turkish in her work, refusing to be restricted to the linguistic sense and rhythmic operations of any one language.

As we have seen, Burak uses narrative elements and characters, but she did not compose in a linear style: as she suggests, she often assembled her texts from

²⁴³Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.11.

fragments literally pinned up all over her house in collaboration with friends and family members.²⁴⁴ While the narrative elements mean that the work is sometimes closer to a novel, short story or play, the methods of juxtaposition and of repetitive, rhythmic linkage are closer to poetry. This play with narrative elements also links to the performance of voice in her work. We see an example of this in the later pages of *Yanık Saraylar*, where Burak writes:

YOU, Baron Spring, Cannot think of the cruelty
of life
YOU HAVE EVERYTHING
CARS
YACHTS
A HOUSE WITH SEVEN DWARFS
COUPONS
KIDS
AND I AM TOO LONELY
TO BE AFRAID OF DYING²⁴⁵

Here the address to another character is suggestive of a play: it is presented as the performance of a voice. Interestingly, Burak's sarcastic address to figures of male power (here, the character Baron Spring, who 'HAS EVERYTHING / CARS / YACHTS / A HOUSE WITH SEVEN DWARFS / COUPONS / KIDS'), and her expression of female isolation and loneliness shares parallels with younger Turkish female poets such as Lale Müldür and Nilgün Marmara, alongside contemporary Turkish playwrights and short story writers, who write in the same tradition of

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Burak, *Yanık Saraylar*, p.35. My translation.

experimenting with narrative and following her example. For example, we see a similar technique of using capitalised words and an aggressive address to a second person in Lale Müldür's poetry, most importantly in 'The Busses of Fear':

RIMBAUD WAS SEEING AN AURA...

SHUT UP I AM SAYING

SHUT UP

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

AND DO YOU THINK THAT I CARE²⁴⁶

Likewise Nilgün Marmara's poem "Experiment" juxtaposes objects in a way that resembles the poetic theatricality of Burak's works:

One black iris	One engulfed lake
One curious moth	One shooting coward
One thin finger	One flown hair
One assured chair	One whole drinking loads
One mask clock	One reflected change
One lost back	One desiring stone

One black iris engulfed the lake.

One shooting coward shot the curious moth.

One hair flown on to the thin finger.

A drinker filled the assured chair.

One clock mask reflected the change.

One stone wanted the lost back.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Müldür, *Anemon / Toplu Şiirler*, p.42. My translation.

²⁴⁷ Nilgün Marmara, *Daktiloya Çekilmiş Şiirler*, ed. by Tülin Er, 17 edn (İstanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2020), p.40. My translation.

While it is useful to place Burak alongside poets such as Müldür or Marmara, who are also often neglected in discussions of Turkish modernism which focus primarily on male writers, her work is actually more experimental than theirs, in that it more consistently crosses generic boundaries, as she writes plays, novels and short stories as well as poems. In fact, however, as I have suggested, it is hard to categorize any of her works according to one form: her plays often resemble poems, her novels resemble plays, and her poems play with narrative elements more normally associated with prose writing. That is one of the reasons why Burak remains an enigmatic figure: her work is linguistically experimental and she does not just write in one form. I would also suggest that her neglect can be attributed to the misogyny of much Turkish literary criticism, in which writers like Burak, Nilgun Marmara and Müldür are stigmatized as ‘crazy’ and incomprehensible, their work sidelined to sensationalist biographical accounts which do not take seriously their contributions to Turkish avant-garde writing. (I will return to this below.)

Narratives at play

Sevim Burak was not from a conventionally literary background, and like Nilgün Marmara and Lale Müldür, she focuses on the experiences of those marginalized and exploited in a technocratic capitalist society. Born to a Jewish mother, who was forced to change her name and religion in order to marry into an upper-class Muslim family, Burak maintained a complex relationship to her Jewish heritage, which she simultaneously celebrated and disavowed in subsequent interviews, and also, most notably, in *Ah Ya Rab Jehova (Oh God Jehovah)* (1964), a short story dedicated to her mother. An exploration of her maternal family tree through to the Old Testament, this

story is also about the impossibility of fully knowing the history of minority cultural identities, such as Burak's own Jewish heritage, which have been the victims of violence, dispossession and erasure.²⁴⁸

Ey kardeşim, seni nasıl kurtarayım? Bir çocuk doğurdun, o çocuk senin değildir, sana 'Anam' diyemeyecek, ismini tanımayacak, bu toprak üstünde gizli kalacak, yeryüzünde serseri ve kaçak olacaktır.

Oh sister, how can I save you? You gave birth to a baby, but the baby is not yours, she will not call you 'Mother', she will not know her name, she will remain hidden in these lands, she will be a vagabond on this earth and a fugitive.²⁴⁹

Just as *Burnt Palaces* is not a conventional narrative, this is by no means a conventional autobiography. As mentioned above, the story explores Burak's maternal family tree: it presents the ancestors of Zembul (Burak's mother), who is giving birth to Bilal Bey's child, though they are not married. 'Bilal Bey lives with Zembul, a Jewish girl, whose pregnancy had put pressure on Bilal Bey, alongside dealing with Zembul's Jewish family and their friends.'²⁵⁰ There are also characters named from the old testament, such as Yahya, Malhus, Lazar, Davut, Zakarya, Yeruşalmi, Ventura, İda, Betuel, and Yasef.²⁵¹ As well as this important thematic exploration of Jewishness, *Ah Ya Rab Jehova* is also experimental in form: characters blur into each other; there are jarring juxtapositions between the ancient and the

²⁴⁸ See Carolyn J. Dean, *Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim After the Holocaust*, 2 edn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017)., Marc J. Rosenstein, *Turning Points in Jewish History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, University of Nebraska Press, 2017). and Avner Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Yahudiler*, 3 edn (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010).

²⁴⁹ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.9.

²⁵⁰ Seher Özkök, *Yaşama Teğelli Öyküler: Sevim Burak'ın Öyküleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme* (Bursa: Sentez Yayınları, 2014).

²⁵¹ Bedia Koçakoğlu, 'Sevim Burak'ı Besleyen Damarlar', *Selçuk Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Edebiyat Dergisi*, 17, (2007), 45-59, p. 51.

modern; and there are appearances of surreal violence, as we see in the following example.

Sara – Luiza – Bohora – Kalo – Betuel – Vivi kapiya koştular

Gelen YA RAB YEHOVA IDI

O'nun elinde ateş vardı

Bir kalabalık yokuşu çıktı

Onların da ellerinde ATEŞ vardı

Esvaplarını bağurdılar

ATEŞ

ATEŞ

ATEŞ

ZEMBUL KAPIYA KOŞTU

O'NUN DA ELİNDE ATEŞ VARDI

Sara-Luiza—Bohora—Kalo—Betuel—Vivi ran to the door

It was O GOD JEHOVA

In His hand was fire

A crowd climbed the hill

In their hands too was FIRE

They tore their clothes and shouted

FIRE

FIRE

FIRE

ZEMBUL RAN TO THE DOOR

IN HER HAND TOO THERE WAS FIRE²⁵²

²⁵² Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.52.

As we see from these examples above, repetition is vital to Burak's work. As Güngörmüş notes:

Sevim Burak's literature is a literature of repetition. Events, issues, characters are constantly repeated from one text to another. Sentences are repeated within the same text. Nouns, adjectives, conjugated verbs are listed in the text. Repetition for Burak is the essence of both style and content.²⁵³

She suggests that this may have to do with Burak's fear of death: through repetition, her writing both expresses this fear and defies it.²⁵⁴ From her early teens, Burak suffered from chronic heart disease, which would eventually account for her death at the relatively young age of 52. As attested by her letters, she was obsessed with health and a fear of dying, a concern only exacerbated by the fact that her parents died when she was sixteen, first her mother, and then her father seven months after. Forced to quit high school by this loss of her parents, she lived with her grandparents, a period to which she attributes her obsession with death, illness and premature ageing because of being around mainly elderly people. As she would later put it, 'I grew up to be old'.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, she began a career as a fashion model in Istanbul, and, after modeling at the US embassy, was invited to the United States for a fashion show, an experience she would later remember with great fondness for its opening up of new cultural horizons. Always suspicious of Turkish literary culture, her visit to the States is characteristic of her nomadic existence, marked by periods of travel to London and

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Her use of repetition might be related to Freud's notion of 'repetition compulsion' and the 'death drive'. For a psychanalytic reading of Burak's work, see Nilüfer Erdem, 'Analysis of Two Short Stories of Sevim Burak Through the Perspective of Applied Psychoanalysis: "Portrait of the Artist As Her Mother's Daughter"', (Masters thesis. Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi: 2010).

²⁵⁵ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.92.

Nigeria which are addressed in her later books *Afrika Dansı* (1982) and *Everest My Lord* (1984). After being a model for a number of years, she opened up her own fashion boutique. Having already written her first short story when she was twelve, as we saw above, she now began to submit her writing to newspapers and literary magazines while in her late 20s.

After the May 27th, 1960 coup attempt in Turkey, Burak closed down her fashion boutique to devote most of her time to writing. As poet Enis Batur noted, she would attach the manuscripts of her stories on to her curtains, covering the interior of her house with pieces of manuscript paper.²⁵⁶ Güngörmüş expands on this:

Sevim Burak works with a ‘cut-and-paste’ pre-computer method of her own invention. She has the texts which she writes by hand typed in several copies, then cuts them and pins them together, and attaches them here and there in the house, particularly to the curtains and rearranges them.²⁵⁷

We could read this as a parody of the conventional role of the ‘home-maker’, but it is perhaps more useful to see it as a transformation of the domestic space into a kind of writing laboratory. For Burak, writing, making clothes and sewing curtains are equally valid creative activities, and daily life cannot be removed from creativity, even as her experimentation argues against separating female domestic labour from creativity and the world at large, and challenges gendered categories which associate certain kinds of labour or creativity with a gendered essence. (Recall the girl disguised as a boy as a figure for the writer in her first short story, discussed above).

²⁵⁶ Enis Batur, *Bekçi* (İstanbul: Oğlak Yayınları, 2003), p. 110.

²⁵⁷ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.82.

As Burak's 'pre-computer' compositional practices perhaps suggest, Burak placed a heavy emphasis on the visual quality of her work. As we have seen, her work was marked by non-standard use of punctuation, capitalization and grammar, subverting whichever form in which she chose to work. This was a factor in both the composition of her work and in the visual appearance of the final published versions, which incorporated drawings and diagrams. Two examples are provided below.

Illustration VI – A sample of Sevim Burak’s arrangement of drafts, illustrating the visual components of her work, reproduced in Sevim Burak, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak* p.85

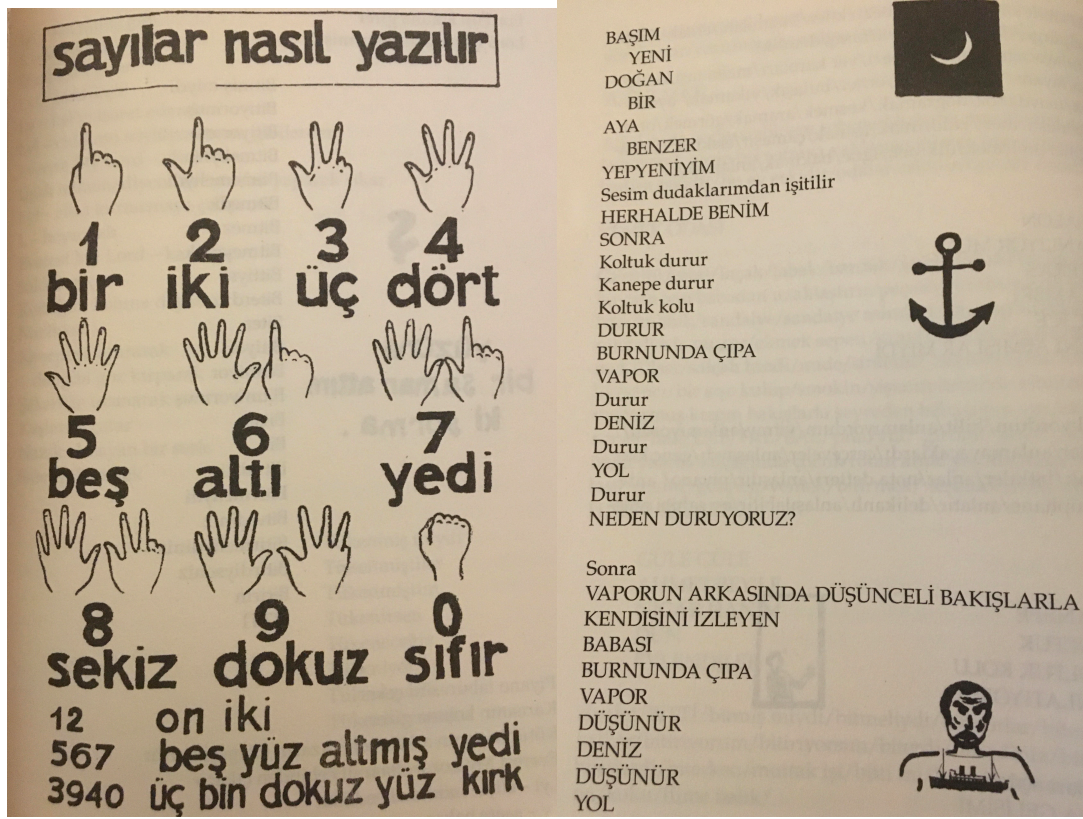


Illustration VII – Illustration from Sevim Burak, *Everest My Lord*, pp. 19-32

Here we see how her writing includes elements reminiscent of concrete and sound poetry alongside passages of diaristic, autobiographical narrative woven into polyphonic dialogues from multiple characters. In the first case, we have a sense of how her use of curtains for displaying the work encouraged attention to the visual element. In the second case, we see how she incorporates signs, graphic elements and other meaning systems into her writing. While this recalls contemporaneous work by Belgian ‘outsider artist’ Sophie Podolski, and by the later UK poet Maggie O’Sullivan and Polish-Canadian poet Frances Kruk, it is also highly original.²⁵⁸ As we have

²⁵⁸ Sophie Podolski, *le pays out tout est permis* (Paris: Belfond, 1972). Maggie O’ Sullivan, *States of Emergency* (Oxford, UK: International Concrete Poetry Archive Publication Number 11, 1987). Frances Kruk, *lo-fi frags in-progress* (Surrey, UK: Veer Books, 2015).

seen, Burak's plays look like short stories, her short stories look like plays, and all look like modernist poems.

As well as Jewishness, Burak's thematic interests were mainly the issues of modernity, poverty, identity, and the fear of death. She did not want to write for people who found their place in this world and were at peace with themselves. In a recent article on Burak's work, Hakan Arslanbezer argues: 'She was writing for those who had lost their minds, for those who lost their worlds, for the dreamers, for those who prepare to leave this world.'²⁵⁹ As suggested earlier, the subject of death plays an important role in Burak's work. The experimental novel *Ford Mach I*, which was left unfinished at Burak's death, perhaps unsurprisingly contains the words 'death' and 'dying' as a kind of obsessive refrain:

Only I know that I am dying
I am dead
But one side of me is alive
One side of me killed the other
Like an enemy...
Only I know that I am dying
Because my mind is working
It does not count as dead
It is not like God's job death
I am like machine produced
I am like a machine
There is an iron claw on my face

²⁵⁹ Hakan Arslanbezer, 'Sevim Burak: 'I won't write for the astute'', *Daily Sabah*, 12 November 2016.

My name is written on my forehead

Ford Mach I²⁶⁰

This text, in which the narrator conducts a ‘war’ against cars in the streets of a modern metropolis, reflects Burak’s terror in the face of modern mechanized society.²⁶¹ But, at the same time, she was also fascinated by cars and learned to race them as research for the book. As Güngörmüş notes: ‘She threw herself into this task with all her being. Because she didn’t want to write about something she had not experienced, she sold her furniture and bought a Colver, and participated in car races’.²⁶²

Burak herself described Mach I as “a god in my eyes”.²⁶³ Rather than the ‘god Jehovah’ of Burak’s earlier text, here, it is the car that becomes a machine “god” that is in control of the narrator’s life and foresees how the future will unfold. The narrator in the excerpt above has his name written on her forehead in an ambivalent Biblical echo. In the book of *Revelation*, the blessed in the kingdom of heaven have God’s name written on their foreheads. But a name is also written on the forehead of ‘MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT’, the so-called ‘whore of Babylon’ who represents worldly decadence before the apocalypse, and those who follow the Antichrist have the ‘mark of the beast’ written on their foreheads.²⁶⁴ In Burak’s novel, Mach I is both the narrator’s enemy and herself.

MACH I THE MONSTER

²⁶⁰ Burak, *Ford Mach I*, p.30. My translation.

²⁶¹ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, pp.10-11.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Burak, *Ford Mach I*, p.116. My translation.

²⁶⁴ *Revelation* 3:12, *Revelation* 22: 3-4, *Revelation* 14:9, 17: 5-8

GIVE ME CREDIT IF YOU PLEASE
MACH I EXPRESSES ME
THAT I AM AN AUTOMOBILE²⁶⁵

As Güngörmüş writes: ‘She has become one with the enemy that has given her his name’.²⁶⁶

Mach I becomes both herself and her antagonist. She endeavours to domesticate him. She wrestles with him, tussles and struggles with him. She says she will defeat Ford Mach I, shape him as she wants and rid herself of him.²⁶⁷

Güngörmüş suggests that the car in this novel is the ultimate example of the anger that suffuses Burak’s work, as the hybrid human-machine first person moves along “roads reeking of death” to “take her blood revenge”.

In an interview with the BBC given in 1978, while she was in London receiving heart surgery, Burak said that her real enemy was death, and that all her stories were about her struggle with death.²⁶⁸ Güngörmüş argues convincingly that the metaphor of the car race becomes a metaphor for Burak’s struggle to finish the novel before her own death.²⁶⁹ Of course, the danger of the high-speed car-race itself has a potent association with death, a thanatopic connection famously explored in the work of J.G. Ballard at around the same period, though there is no evidence that she knew this

²⁶⁵ Burak, *Ford Mach I*, p.23.

²⁶⁶ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.116.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

work.²⁷⁰ Equally obsessed with cars and death, in *Ford Mach I* Burak creates a claustrophobic, intense and at times incantatory dystopic text. The car, symbol of an Americanised masculinity, of speed, modernity and war, is present everywhere in the city. As Güngörmüş writes, *Ford Mach I* draws on “the speeding teenagers of Bağdat Caddesi (a boulevard in Istanbul), city contractors, classified ads in the papers, street signs, automobile parts, tires and exhausts pipes.”²⁷¹ Haunted everywhere by machines, and herself seeming to become a machine, Burak’s narrator is intensely paranoid, but this paranoia is also an accurate reflection of the mental states created by the modern cityscape and by a climate of rampant consumerism.

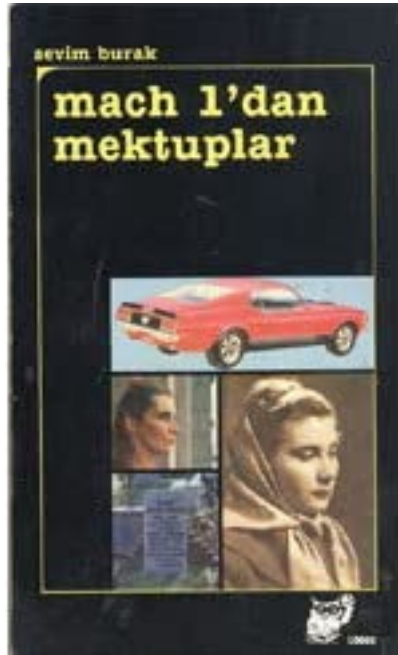


Illustration VIII: Cover to Sevim Burak’s collection of letters, *Letters from Mach I*. Sevim Burak, *Mach I'dan Mektuplar* (İstanbul: Logos Yayınevi, 1990).

While earlier, the Italian Futurists had written of the speed and danger of cars and the modern city from a masculine perspective, Burak challenges these classic modernist

²⁷⁰ See J. G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London, UK: Jonathan Cape, 1970). and J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (London, UK: Jonathan Cape, 1973).

²⁷¹ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.18.

concerns by presenting technology, in relation to violence and consumerism, as a cause of paranoia. The same is true of the use of violence in her work. Burak's thematic interests show similarities with those of European avant-garde playwrights and performance artists influenced by Samuel Beckett, who Burak mentions as an influential figure, the Theatre of the Absurd and the Theatre of Cruelty, and, later, British playwright Sarah Kane.²⁷² Like Burak, Kane is known for focusing in her writing on psychological topics that comes from her personal experiences of isolation, male violence, mental illness and the often brutal techniques of modern psychiatry and medicine, in which the suffering body and a world of mechanized violence intersect with often astonishing ferocity. Kane's most experimental play "4.48 Psychosis" shares many stylistic similarities with Burak's work: most notably, the text, though nominally a 'play', reads as much like a diary or a poem for multiple voices as it does a conventional piece of psychologically realist drama involving the interaction of separate characters.²⁷³ Written during the early hours of the morning, and named for the hour of the night at which the largest number of suicides is said to occur, Kane's text is relentlessly bleak, assailing herself, society and life itself.

I am sad

I feel that the future is hopeless and that things cannot improve

I am bored and dissatisfied with everything

I am a complete failure as a person

I am guilty, I am being punished

I would like to kill myself

I used to be able to cry but now I am beyond tears

²⁷² Bedia Koçakoğlu, *Aşkın Şizofrenik Hali - Sevim Burak*, ed. by Harun Yıldız (Konya: Palet Yayınları, 2009), pp.98-99.

²⁷³ "4.48 Psychosis" by Sarah Kane was first performed in 2000 at the Royal Court Theatre in London.

I have lost interest in other people

I can't make decisions

I can't eat

I can't sleep²⁷⁴

Kane's use of anaphora and parataxis is very similar to the Burak passage quoted earlier.

Sarah Kane is famous for the extreme violence of her plays, which throughout contain extremely brutal acts of violence, such as the eating of a dead baby in *Blasted* (1995), influenced by Antonin Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty' and by Roman and Jacobean revenge tragedy.²⁷⁵ Burak described her play *Here Is The Body Here Is The Head Here Are The Wings* as a 'horror play'.²⁷⁶ We see this element of 'horror' in an extremely violent passage from the play which features murder and cannibalism.

MELEK: First I must cut off the head...(She comes in from the outside dragging an ostensible person, the gravestone carver, to kill him in the kitchen at the other end of the room...She disappears into the kitchen, and again her voice is heard) I have severed the head from the body, here is the head, here is the body, here are the wings...It's all complete...

NIVART: Put it in the pan immediately (*Delighted*)

MELEK: I'm putting it in the pan, now I am adding some tomato, a bit of salt, pepper, I have chopped some parsley...plenty of water, that's it...it is wonderful, you will

²⁷⁴ Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted; Phaedra's Love; Cleansed; Crave; 4.48 Psychosis; Skin* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), p.206.

²⁷⁵ Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. by Mary Caroline Richards (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1958).

. Also see Albert Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre Of Cruelty* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

²⁷⁶ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.102.

enjoy it a lot...(*She comes out of the kitchen with what is supposed to be a large plate*).

Now I'm giving you the head, that's the most esteemed part (*She pretends to serve it and sit down*).

NIVART (*Pitying*): What beautiful eyes he has...

MELEK: His eyes are lovely.

NIVART: His eyelashes are long, as if he is looking at me (*Begins to cry*). How can we eat him?²⁷⁷

However, Burak's work tends as a whole to focus less on external acts of violence than Kane's and more on the psychological filtration of states of depression and threat.²⁷⁸ The violence is always under the surface, but only rarely, as in the example above, does it explode into action. More often the violence is internal. For example, Burak's early story *O God Jehovah* includes a needle, which travels to the character Bilal Bey's heart.

The needle began to move towards my heart – When I realized that the needle was coming towards my heart – I began to walk towards the South.²⁷⁹

Burak had open-heart surgery in London in 1978 and, in the BBC talk given at this time, she discussed her sense that she had prophesied and perhaps even caused this through the earlier story.

I have been in London for three months for an open-heart operation. I cannot help thinking about Bilal Bey's needle. If I had known that the needle which had killed

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ See the analysis (in Turkish) at: Bahar Akpınar, *İyi ki Doğdun Sevim Burak* (2015) <<https://m.bianet.org/bianet/sanat/165633-iyi-ki-dogdun-sevim-burak>> [accessed 16 October 2020].

²⁷⁹ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, p.112.

Bilal Bey would reappear in me seven years later, I don't think I would have written the story. On the other hand, I now understand that inside I lived the reality of Bilal Bey for years as my own reality and that I was compelled to write that story, and I admit that because of this I was afraid of writing and avoided it.²⁸⁰

While this experience made her fear the influence of her writing on her own life, in the last decade of her life Burak would use writing as a way to encounter the threat of death. In her play *His Master's Voice* (1982), finished the year before her death, Bilal's needle re-appears.

BİLAL: A needle moving from the rib cage entered the path to the heart with violent pain and aching, arousing suspicion that my end had come, and in panic they ran to the basement, opened the door, took matches from the inner pocket of my waistcoat, and on the point of striking it, the pain subsided and the needle stopped moving. Death is making fun of us.²⁸¹

This sense of death is ever-present in Burak's work. For example, unable to distinguish between exterior and interior, the furniture in the room and the 'stops' taken by a ferry, car or public transport, the narrator of *Everest My Lord* sees Hyde Park as a cemetery.

[...] and this corner of Hyde Park looks like a cemetery / [...] The doors of the rooms are open / IT'S GROWING ON EARTH / Now depends on the furniture surrounding

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

(...) SOFA / Stops / FERRY / Stops / SEA / Stops / ROAD / Stops / WHY ARE WE STOPPING?²⁸²

One might go so far as to say that Burak sees the entire world as a giant graveyard in which the entire landscape is coloured by her own obsession with death.

This obsession is not, however, related only to Burak's own life. She also talks about the loneliness suffered by women across all classes in contemporary society, linked to poverty and death. In her first book *Burnt Palaces*, Burak writes:

SILENCE

WAS

LONG

AND

SKINNY

Also:

This woman lives for her arm; I, live for my coat. But can one live for NOTHING?

She thought.

Women put her broken arm into its place with the years of experience

SHE WAS REALLY ALONE²⁸³

Here, the “long / and / skinny” silence comes from the woman who lives for her coat. Influenced by her career as a model and a fashion designer, Burak is strongly aware of the way that gender roles are produced and identity is suppressed. While she does not directly discuss this in her work, Burak seems to be aware of the way her role in

²⁸² Sevim Burak, *Everest My Lord – İşte Baş İşte Gövde İşte Kanatlar*, 4 edn (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2019), pp.9-32. My translation.

²⁸³ Burak, *Yanık Saraylar*, p.21. My translation.

the fashion industry relies on the often gendered female labour of making garments. As Esther Leslie has argued, Western Capitalism as an economic system has developed in large part through the textile industry and the exploited labour of women in particular.²⁸⁴ Burak seems to nod to this history, whether consciously or not, by referring to the woman who ‘lives for her coat’ as someone who lives for ‘nothing’. In the same book Burak observes:

MY MEMORIES / I FED THESE MEMORIES WITH MY LIFE / MY BLOOD / I
MADE THEM STAND STRAIGHT / PROTECTED THEM FROM FALLING
DOWN / I BROUGHT PAINT/ I HAVE SENT THEM TO SCHOOL / I HAVE
GROWN THEM / UGLY/ BEAUTIFUL / THEY ARE MY CHILDREN... / WHO
DO YOU THINK YOU ARE / THAT YOU WANT TO DEMOLISH MY HOUSE /
MY HOME / WHAT DID I DO TO YOU? / I WORKED / I TRIED / I GAVE
WHATEVER I HAD / IN MY HANDS / I DID NOT EAT / I DID NOT DRINK / I
DID NOT LIVE / I DID NOT MARRY / I BECAME A WIDOW AT A VERY
YOUNG AGE / I DID EVERYTHING MYSELF / I BURNED IN LARGE FOREST
FIRES²⁸⁵

Burak here refers to her memories as her ‘children’, talking about how she worked hard to educate them, feed them, and make sure that they live a good life. At the same time, this passage also suggests how societal expectations make people numb and indifferent to their surroundings, willing to devote their lives to the pursuit of a conventional marriage, consumer goods and a regressive notion of self-sacrifice.

²⁸⁴ Esther Leslie, *The murderous, meaningless caprices of fashion': Marx on capital, clothing and fashion* (2018) <<https://www.culturematters.org.uk/index.php/culture/clothing-fashion/item/2809-the-murderous-meaningless-caprices-of-fashion-marx-on-capital-clothing-and-fashion>> [accessed 16 October 2020].

²⁸⁵ Burak, *Yanık Saraylar*, p.25. My translation.

Burak's speaker both parodies and expresses this life to which the only alternative seems to be death or suicide.

Reception at home and abroad

From the start of her career, male framings of Burak's work affected her both personally and in terms of her literary production. In 1966, Burak's collection *Burnt Palaces* (1965) was nominated for the Sait Faik Short Story Award, but the award was ultimately given to another author. Many felt that a great injustice had been done: the novelist and playwright Memet Fuat resigned from the jury, and articles were written in support of Burak.²⁸⁶ Burak's own reaction was to stop writing in protest. Though she began to write again some years later, beginning work on *His Master's Voice* in 1970 and on *Ford Mach I* in 1971, she faced a struggle to publish her work for a number of years; *Afrika Dansı* (*African Dance*) and *His Master's Voice* did not appear until 1982, the year before her death, and her works *Everest My Lord*, *Here is the Head Here is the Body Here are the Wings* and *Ford Mach I* only appeared after her death.²⁸⁷ As Güngörmüş writes, Burak had a reputation as a 'prima donna' and, indeed, could be difficult personally, but she was also very sensitive and insecure, particularly in the difficult and time-consuming process of writing.²⁸⁸ Because she refused to act in the ways authors were expected to, her work was neglected, though her talent was widely acknowledged. As Güngörmüş puts it:

²⁸⁶ Erdem, 'Analysis of Two Short Stories of Sevim Burak Through the Perspective of Applied Psychoanalysis: "Portrait of the Artist As Her Mother's Daughter"'.
²⁸⁷ Güngörmüş, *Bir Usta Bir Dünya: Sevim Burak*, pp.146-147.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

In real life, Sevim Burak was not able to and did not don the familiar outfit of the writer. She was unique in herself. It must be because of this that, although her literary prowess always appears to be accepted, no one seems to want to believe that she was in fact a writer, or that her writing was filtered through a sharp and clear consciousness. Otherwise how could we explain why such a rich and revolutionary body of work has been treated with silence for so many years?²⁸⁹

Ironically enough, the very normative expectations critiqued in Burak's text have been reproduced in much of the subsequent criticism on her writing. One thing that struck me while reading recent Turkish criticism on Burak was the voyeuristic focus on information about her personal relationships, especially in relation to her husbands. Hakan Arslanbezer's article on Burak's writing, which was published in the State-sponsored *Sabah Newspaper* in 2016, suggests that: 'She was charming and ambitious, but loneliness and unhappiness was second nature. Then she betrayed her husband with Peyami Safa, a famous, old author'.²⁹⁰ He then goes on: 'That affair affected her both romantically and poetically. Many of her characters cheat on their spouses. Besides, she is always self-centered and psychological, which may have come from Peyami Safa's self-centered, psychological style.'²⁹¹ Burak was dismissed using conventionally gendered language as 'charming' but also criticized as 'ambitious' and selfish. Arslanbenzer even suggests that Burak's 'cheating' and 'betrayal' of her husband influenced her work, and that her writing is 'self-centred and psychological'. Even then, he does not allow her credit for this work: her writing about the self or about psychology is presented as derived from her husband's work, rather than emerging from her own, legitimate concerns.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Arslanbezer, 'Sevim Burak: 'I won't write for the astute'.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

This situation has persisted until recently. When one looks at the Turkish Wikipedia page for Burak's second husband, the famous painter Ömer Uluç, there is no information about Burak there, even though Burak's page has information on all the male artists she was romantically involved with. It is as if her art would not be worth discussing without being framed by a man, whereas wives are irrelevant to the accounts of male artists.²⁹² This has recently begun to change: several conferences have taken place on her work in Turkey, and the August 2017 issue of the literary journal *Notos Öykü* contains a lengthy feature on Burak, with pieces by eight different writers.²⁹³ Nilüfer Güngörmüş's biographical essay in the exhibition catalogue *One Master, One World: Sevim Burak* (2013), which draws on interviews with Burak's friends and relatives, is also a useful reclamation of Burak's work, and, necessarily, an important critical source for this chapter, even as I extend her work by placing Burak in dialogue with other authors from both inside and outside a Turkish context, and by avoiding an exclusively biographical framework.

However, while the situation in Turkey is slowly changing, so that Burak can at last be understood beyond a misogynist framing, it is vital that Burak's work be introduced to an English-speaking audience. Turkish experimental literature remains under-represented beyond Turkey's own borders. For instance, despite being described by UNESCO as an important piece of world literature in urgent need of

²⁹² See, for Ömer Uluç: 'Ömer Uluç'. *Wikipedia Turkey*. <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%96mer_Ulu%C3%A7> Accessed 20th October 2020.

, and for Sevim Burak, 'Sevim Burak'. *Wikipedia Turkey*. <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sevim_Burak> Accessed 20th October 2020.

²⁹³ See Diyaloglar 2017: Sevim Burak'ın "Yanık Saraylar"ı (Boğaziçi University Nazım Hikmet Kültür ve Sanat Araştırma Merkezi, İstanbul, 2017), *Yazarın Gayriresmi Portresi – Sevim Burak* (Yapı Kredi Kültür Merkezi, İstanbul, 2004), *Ölümünün 30. Yılında Sevim Burak* (Mimar Sinan University, Department of Turkish Language and Literature, İstanbul, 2013. *Notos Öykü*, Issue 65, 2017.

English translation, Oğuz Atay's novel *Tutunamayanlar* (*The Disconnected*) (1972) has only just been published in English translation, in what the publisher Otrix Press calls "an expensively-produced limited edition of 200 copies" available only directly from the publisher.²⁹⁴ While work by Elif Şafak and Orhan Pamuk is widely available in English, it is often framed through the clichéd idea of Turkey as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures: what leading Turkish cultural critic Nurdan Gürbilek calls: "that unavoidable, and Pollyannaish, trope of Turkey as a bridge: a bridge between East and West, Muslim and Christian domains, modern and not-so-modern societies – a jumble of scenes even I find hard to connect."²⁹⁵ As Gürbilek notes, "contradictions lie at the foundation of almost all cultures, not only those which like Turkey lie beyond the capitalist center"; they are not the "natural contradictions of an unchanging Turkish climate".²⁹⁶ However, these clichés affect the way Turkish literature is received. In *Kötü Çocuk Türk* (*Bad Boy Turk*) Gürbilek comments, for example, that "Orhan Pamuk is one of Turkey's most Western authors: he was Western-educated, he owes his existence to Westernization, and he employs a western art form, yet despite this, he cannot escape being a Turk in the West."²⁹⁷ It is perhaps because of these cultural framings that more experimental novels and poetic and trans-genre material such as that of Burak is far less represented in translation, or in English-language critical writing, than that of Pamuk or Şafak.²⁹⁸ In my account of her work here and in the links I draw to my own creative work later in the thesis, I will try to correct this. Virtually unknown in English-speaking countries, Sevim

²⁹⁴ 'Tutunamayanlar (*The Disconnected*)' by Oğuz Atay, UNESCO Clearing House for Literary Translation, UNESCO Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=19184&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html> [accessed 20th October 2020].

²⁹⁵ Nurdan Gürbilek, *The New Cultural Climate in Turkey: Living in a Shop Window*, trans. by Victoria Holbrook (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011).

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Nurdan Gürbilek, *Kötü Çocuk Türk*, 2 edn (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2004), p.81.

²⁹⁸ Exceptions are the recent translations of Bilge Karasu, İlhan Berk and others cited previously.

Burak's work is nonetheless an essential part of the story of Turkish modernism, and a key part in my own formative processes as a writer.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I have discussed the role of cultural narrative and alternative topography in the work of Ingeborg Bachmann, Etel Adnan, and Sevim Burak. In this chapter, I will now explore the connection between my research into these authors and my own poetry. The collection of poems that follows, entitled *Master Island*, is made out of four different sequences: “Night Poems”, “Exit Point on Earth”, “Master Island”, and “Counter Dance”.²⁹⁹ The first three of these sequences of the collection were previously published in a pamphlet under the name *Master Island* in 2018, making this version a second extended edition. The title of the book is a reference to the British nostalgia for mastery implicit in the Brexit campaign and the growing racism I’ve witnessed in the U.K. after Brexit: ‘In this island we all hate / Some of us more than others’.³⁰⁰ The poems in the first sequence of the book, “Night Poems”, written in prose form, were influenced by Ingeborg Bachmann’s early poetry, such as *Borrowed Time*.³⁰¹ The sequence was also influenced by Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*, a writer who Bachmann mentions in her “Frankfurt Lectures”.³⁰² In addition to the energy and ontological torment of the elegies, I particularly responded to the feeling of being confined in one space to write. This led to my own lines, derived in part from reading Rilke: ‘I’m writing these now on a very curious desk with books king-size cigarettes under the smoke and with the smell of old furniture the memories of other people are easily erased from this room.’³⁰³ I first came across Bachmann’s work in 2018, by reading *Darkness Spoken*, Peter Filkins’ English

²⁹⁹ Gizem Okulu, *Master Island*, 1 edn (Suffolk: Tipped Press, 2018).

³⁰⁰ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.149.

³⁰¹ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.2.

³⁰² Robertson, *A Translation of "Fragen und Scheinfragen," a Lecture on Modern German-Language Literature by Ingeborg Bachmann*.

³⁰³ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.135.

translation of her poems. What struck me first, in Bachmann's writing, was her use of the personal and the political, often together. In "Night Flight", for example, she writes: 'Our field is the sky/ plowed by the engine's sweat, / in the face of night, / at the risk of a dream'.³⁰⁴ My response to this can be seen in the sequence "Master Island": 'Our disturbance is not the sky but the familiar. / our earth is dust and rusty metal fools/ our earth is shattered by the prospect of earthquakes'.³⁰⁵ These two examples have to do with a sense of risk and catastrophe transplanted through a surreal register: my lines ('Our disturbance is not the sky but the familiar', our earth is shattered by the prospect of earthquakes') reverse Bachmann's, in that she inverts the trope of ploughing a field to ploughing the sky (an impossible task), while I contrast the sky—as the realm of the unfamiliar, and thus a sign of disturbance—with the earth as the space of the familiar. The earth itself in my poem anticipates the dislocation of earthquakes before they've happened: the very ground the poet (the narrator of the poem) stands on is metaphorically and literally unsteady. This sense of the earth and the land as unsteady also relates to my discussion of Bachmann and the rhetoric of land, the suspicion of associating land and ground with stability and belonging that often reinforces harmful nationalist myths. Here and elsewhere, my poems are in dialogue with the works discussed earlier.

Tonality is central to the manuscript of *Master Island*, alongside the feeling of constriction. The resulting emphasis on brevity is reflected through form, line lengths and the use of unadorned language. Constriction, in another sense, is also reflected in the narrowed environment suggested by the focus on single objects such as a "single room", a "single desk", a "tiny island", a "cheap plastic lighter", and the "RNA". This

³⁰⁴ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.48.

³⁰⁵ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.152.

constriction of line lengths can be seen, for example, in the short lines ‘I begin with altering, / everything’ or ‘Master island/ stands still’.³⁰⁶ The language of alertness, the sudden changes of capitalization and rhythm, which are also part of my poetics, comes from my reading of poetry by Frances Kruk and Sean Bonney, whose work guided me the most after Adnan’s, Bachmann’s, and Burak’s. I owe this technical debt to them. Both Kruk and Bonney have been influential over younger poets in the British experimental poetry scene, which I am involved in through being published by small presses in the U.K. and also through my involvement with *Splinter* poetry magazine as a co-editor since 2017.³⁰⁷

As my thesis title (and the title of the collection) suggests, location and narrative play an important role throughout *Master Island*: Thus, my poem [Expecting, in a land missing time...] announces the desire, ‘Expecting, in a land missing time, / To recover what is lost’.³⁰⁸ There are parallels with Bachmann’s idea of ‘mortgaged’ or ‘borrowed’ time (here, time is ‘missing’ from the land). These narratives of departure and return recall Bachmann’s ‘Departure from England’: ‘I have barely stepped upon your land, / silent country, barely disturbed a stone. /.../ I have never stepped on its land.’³⁰⁹ Location is an important element in Burak’s work too. Especially in *Ford Mach I*, in which she overlays Istanbul with London: ‘BEYAZ Akasya GÖZTEPE Erenköy run EARLS COURT... connects NOTER STREET TO FINSBURY PARK And as if EVERYONE CAN COME IN’.³¹⁰ This is similar to my poems, where the landscapes and spaces I employ are imaginary spaces: ‘In a city surrounded by its

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ David Grundy, Gizem Okulu (eds.), *Splinter Magazine* (2020) <<http://splintermag.blogspot.com/2017/08/splinter-magazine-issue-1.html>> [accessed 22 December 2020].

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.7.

³¹⁰ Burak, *Ford Mach I*, pp.57-58. My translation.

own domes planes find their way using telepathic coordination. But where am I going.³¹¹ Likewise, Adnan's *The Arab Apocalypse* moves between numerous capital cities, as well as outer space: 'Beirut bleeds matter circles in tornadoes on nebulae's surfaces O Milky Way! / more blood than milk more pus than wine Jupiter'.³¹² In "Journey Out", the first poem in her collection *Borrowed Time*, Bachmann writes: 'Smoke rises from the land.'³¹³ In my response to this, in "Exit Point on Earth", I wrote: 'But I cannot accept this, I said/ We can't risk another interruption/ triggered by the same smoke.'³¹⁴ The "smoke" referred to in my poem is, ultimately, the smoke of history, the unsettling nostalgia of the past overshadowing the presence. This is the 'smoke' that we are covered in. The "dust", "particles" are already mixed in with the air we breathe in. This becomes 'Spitting particles of air / frosty silver air' and the references to "dust" in *Master Island*.

In her poem "Libraries," Bachmann wrote: "The shelves sag.... They have saved themselves upon the island of knowledge. / Sometimes they've lost their conscience. / Here and there, protruding/ from them, human fingers'.³¹⁵ The "human fingers" here suggest that the history in these books excludes the human: books become metaphorical 'islands' which escape the terrors of history by insulating knowledge in the enclosed spaces of the book and the library. Using writing for a more active reckoning with history is vital for Bachmann's poetics, and the same is true for mine: 'When you're young and live under another sky/ do not think of a word to remember. / They will form islands and stretch / through volcanic touch'.³¹⁶ Later on in the

³¹¹ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.135.

³¹² Takieddine Amyuni, Etel Adnan's 'THE ARAB APOCALYPSE'.

³¹³ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*. p.3.

³¹⁴ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.143.

³¹⁵ Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*. p.250.

³¹⁶ Okulu, *Master Island*. p.180.

collection, the lines ‘Not wanting to mimic the past/ But to trace what’s happening today’ answer some of the questions that I ask myself about writing and its relation to history.³¹⁷ The emphasis in these questions is topics such as literary tradition, the history of the language used, and the geographical spaces where the writing happens. I return to these concerns in other poems: ‘What causes this violence is mirroring you’, and ‘My body breaks in new lands/ takes its form/.... / It is the gaps in your history’.³¹⁸ Here the body itself is occupying the gaps in history created by one’s memory, which is subjective. Similarly, in the lyrical poems, “Poem For The Recreation Of My Youth” and “Poem For A Song”, the references to “another sky” and “dark history” draw their influence from my reading of Bachmann’s poetry.³¹⁹ Both Bachmann and I use the first person narrative in our poems to untangle cultural and sociopolitical issues we’ve witnessed. For Bachmann, this was the rise of the Nazi era, and for me, it was the growing racism (and nationalism) I’ve experienced. On the other hand, my “I” is very different to Bachmann’s as it takes a more performative turn. I will discuss this later in relation to Sevim Burak.

Bachmann’s preoccupation with language has also been important to me. In a speech of 1959, discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, she famously described language as a “weapon”: “‘if we had language, we would not need the weapons.’³²⁰ This sentence has been very important to my practice. It influenced the lines ‘I’m sharpening my words / in all the right rooms/ I can get in’.³²¹ This asserts that my vision of writing is a practice of ‘sharpening words’ as weapons for use in the present. Sharpening

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Emma Garman, *Feminize Your Canon: Ingeborg Bachmann* (2019) <<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/07/09/feminize-your-canon-ingeborg-bachmann/>> [accessed 16 October 2020].

³²¹ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.145.

implies making the meanings of words more precise. In “Exilic” Bachmann writes: ‘I with the German language/ this cloud around me/ which I keep as a house’.³²² In this case, the language is not weaponized. The language here suggests vigilance, an act of defensiveness in relation to the space, which the poems (and the persona) inhabit. If this language is a house, this also creates these “alternative topographies” which I suggest are the spaces created by language for occupation by the author: ‘I seize / I occupy the floors’.³²³ Whereas Bachmann suggests a kind of de-militarisation of language, my own metaphors (‘sharpening my words / in all the right rooms / I can get in’, ‘I seize / I occupy the floors’) combine this sense of defence and vigilance with a linguistic offensive, metaphorically attempting to seize back spatial and linguistic power. At the same time, I pun on the word ‘occupy’ as stating both the fact of living – or renting – in a particular place, and actively taking over a space from which one was previously excluded. Unlike the Heideggerian discourse of linguistic ‘dwelling’, with its dubious associations with a Nazi rhetoric of belonging to the land, both Bachmann and I suggest a poetics of mobility, in which spaces are inhabited and crossed, transgressing accepted boundaries yet also offering spots of temporary protection and housing.

Where I was initially indebted to Bachmann for her handling of the personal and political lyric, in *Master Island* I have also experimented with the use of narrative and brought elements of songs and fictional characters to the text. Burak taught me how to experiment with narration and opened up possible paths for genre bending. Thus the “Master Island” sequence begins with an epigraphic poem in italics: ‘An ancient fairy

³²² Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken*, p.313.

³²³ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.140.

tale/ from straits faaaar away.’³²⁴ As this suggests, certain qualities of storytelling, such as having a fixed narrator, and location (Master Island) where events take place, come into focus with this poem. Sevim Burak’s book *Yanık Saraylar (Burnt Palaces)* has a similar structure of giving epigraphic cues about the story to come that the narrative continues to explore itself later. ‘Master Island’ is not just concerned with imperial mastery, it also criticizes gender roles and expectations, as we can see in the lines ‘with your highest monuments / men / jobs / children’.³²⁵ As we have seen, Burak, too, was concerned with gender and with women’s role in society. Seher Özkök writes, in relation to Sevim Burak’s *Yanık Saraylar*: ‘This story that examines the timeline of women’s existence in society ... exposes the people who get lost within the changing cultural structure.’³²⁶ As Burak wrote:

I’VE
EARNED
THIS LIFE
WITH
MY TEETH
WITH
MY MEAT
I DID NOT FIND IT ON THE STREET
I’VE STRUGGLED FOR A HUNDRED DAYS
YOU ARE A MAN
YOU CAN SLEEP WHEREVER YOU ARE
ME

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Seher Özkök, *Yaşama Teğelli Öyküler: Sevim Burak’ın Öyküleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme* (Bursa: Sentez Yayınları, 2014), p.59. My translation.

I'M
NOT A MONSTER
I'M
A WOMAN³²⁷

Burak's lines suggest that subjects who are gendered as female are not afforded the same privileges of dwelling as those who are gendered as male. The additional struggles, not merely for recognition, but for a secure and stable place within society, are figured in terms of visceral description – 'WITH / MY TEETH / WITH / MY MEAT' – yet Burak insists 'I'M / NOT A MONSTER / I'M / A WOMAN'. My concept of 'Master Island', and my references to rooms, houses and interior spaces is intended to suggest a critique of the insularity, nationalism and escapism of a privileged – often male – subject position (Bachmann's 'island of knowledge', my own reference to the 'Master Island' of the United Kingdom, and the Heideggerian rhetoric of 'dwelling'). But, as these lines of Burak suggest, they also relate to the struggle to occupy a space which is denied one, which can only be attained through struggle.

Another of the themes of *Master Island* is the "refusal of work": '*run/ run / run/ run/ from your owner!*'³²⁸ This comes from my reading of Burak. For example, in the short story "Ölüm Saati (The Hour of Death)" in *Yanık Saraylar*, Burak wrote: 'But you, you work too much – But that's enough, there is a purpose for everything, including work – This is too much... There is a purpose for everything in life.'³²⁹ Here, Burak's narrator is contemplating the necessity of work in one's life. I wrote:

³²⁷ Burak, *Yanık Saraylar*, p.36. My translation.

³²⁸ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.131.

³²⁹ Burak, *Yanık Saraylar*, pp.88-89. My translation.

‘For the cutting of paper with no job/ no necessity’.³³⁰ This theme also comes from my reading of Rimbaud. Kristen Ross wrote in “Rimbaud and the Resistance to Work”: ‘[T]he narrator refuses the very structure of work, the social division of labor itself that in the nineteenth century is beginning to be pushed to the limits of overspecialization.’³³¹ She quotes from Rimbaud’s *Une Saison en enfer* (*The Season in Hell*): ‘Bosses and workers, all of them peasants, and common.’³³² This relates to the “refusal” in my poetry, in which the refusal of social expectations (especially gendered expectations) the monotony of the work routine, and the space of imagination all play important roles.

Quotation marks, italicization and line breaks all contribute to the tonal work in *Master Island*. Burak writes in her letter collection, *Letters from Mach I*: ‘Writing is a place of circulation, you constantly have to exchange places with words.’³³³ This “exchanging places with words” also contributes to the theatricality of the text, providing signals for the reader. I wrote: ‘I’ll plants signs / symbols in your ears.’³³⁴ In her essay, “Bewilderment”, Fanny Howe writes: ‘A signal does not necessarily mean that you want to be located or described.’³³⁵ This is true for both *Master Island* and Burak’s work: the work is always pointing out a path forward, a possible way out of the scenarios, with the help of other voices employed in the text. I wrote: ‘we carve letters/ instructions on the floor/ now thousands of words/ are manufactured to be triggered’.³³⁶ Where Burak uses an economic metaphor – of circulation and exchange,

³³⁰ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.141.

³³¹ Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, p.50.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ *Notos Öykü*, Issue 65: Sevim Burak, p.27. My translation.

³³⁴ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.170.

³³⁵ Fanny Howe, *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p. 6.

³³⁶ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.151.

I suggest writing as manufacture, beginning with the physical production of signs (carving instructions on the floor) and ending with mass production. Writing poetry is here figured as a practical task connected to labour, bringing in the processes obscured by abstract discourses of language in a process akin to the concealment of workers' labour in the accumulation of capital. This labour connects the individual poet to a larger group – the 'we' who 'carve letters – whose production of 'thousands of words' is also associated with a kind of weaponized potential – 'manufactured to be triggered'. As such, this line works to suggest the expanded, communal first person of Bachmann's 'writing I', one that expands beyond the self and which cannot, in Howe's words, always be "located or described". Nil Sakman wrote on Sevim Burak: 'Almost none of Burak's characters we meet own the voice that talks within themselves, do not name that voice as "I".'³³⁷ Likewise, in my own poetry, I echo this sense of voices "talking within [my]self", the sense of multiple registers and tonalities through the song-like nature of some of the poems, such as the island song, which is intended as a kind of parodic anthem which could be sung by any of the island's inhabitants – "In Master Island/ everything grows/ in spite of itself" – and the occasional use of italics to imply a second voice in other poems: '*this is an eclipse in nowhere*'.³³⁸

At other times, particular poetic forms that Burak has used have influenced me. For example, in the following poem, I've borrowed the 'staircase form' of successive indented lines from Burak's *Ford Mach I*, while the line "I'll tailor myself in drawn clothes" is a direct reference to Burak:

³³⁷ Nil Sakman, *Sevim Burak: K k-Sapın Sesi* (2020) <http://postdergi.com/sevim-burak-kok-sapin-sesi/?fbclid=IwAR3RfaKG0AtBH7-80q-cJq0DrY_ixwB0st88rvGfhQwmahPjdFoKuE_XT4I> [accessed 16 October 2020].

³³⁸ Okulu, *Master Island*, pp.148-152.

I'll tailor myself in drawn clothes

You'll burn me with the first number

I'll moan you of hearts

You'll dance to the furthest creatures³³⁹

The mise-en-page draws the eye across the page to suggest a process of movement and progression, while the visual echo of the staircase draws attention to the materiality of the poem on page and the concerns with space that I have outlined above. Alternating between an 'I' and a 'you', these lines also echo Burak in their suggestion of a dialogue that is also hypothetical or imaginary, rendered as it is in the future tense. This is a space both of possibility and fragility, in which the uncertainty of the future is suggested, along with an ironized sense of poetry's prophetic capacity: imagining alternative futures which are neither wholly dystopian nor wholly utopian, but which might serve as alternatives to the 'master islands' of history.

There are other places where I have been influenced by Burak's form, such as the form and the context of the epigraphic poem of "Master Island":

and where only memories are living

in a glorious city

with your highest monuments

men

jobs

and children³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Ibid.

Here, the refusal of gendered expectations is positioned against the modern development of cities. As I suggested earlier, Burak's treatment of the position of women has been particularly important for me. In one of her stories, "Büyük Kuş (Big Bird)", in *Yanık Saraylar*, the main character, a woman, is shown confronting the city:

She opened the doors of her house

Untied her hair

Sat in front of the town

FEARS

LONELINESS

THEY CAME BACK

Dreams

Vodkas

Vodkas

Oranges

Oranges³⁴¹

As Merve Tabur notes, in this story, Burak addresses 'women's relationship with the city and the masculine structure that is its basis'. She continues: 'The city, which has human qualities as a character, can never accept women, and by constant alienation tries to make them irrelevant.'³⁴² Burak's speaker is thus associated with isolation – 'FEAR' and 'LONELINESS' - and with a disconnected series of objects which crowd in on the poet uncontrollably, in the immaterial form of dreams and the material form

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Burak, *Yanık Saraylar*, p.45. My translation.

³⁴² Merve Tabur, *Sevim Burak Yazınında Zamanın ve Tarihin Dışından Seslenen Kadınlar* (2010) <<http://www.bukak.boun.edu.tr/?p=508>> [accessed 16 October 2020]. My translation.

of alcohol, suggesting anxiety and the loss of control. Poetic exaggeration is one of Burak's techniques to render such experience. In *Master Island* I have used the images of a "tiny whiskey" and a "tiny island" in relation to the narrator's sense of isolation on the island: 'I'm like this coming – going / sitting on a tiny island / drinking a tiny cup of whiskey / in a self hundreds of thousands of miles away / watching the echo of the sound waves'.³⁴³ Burak's speaker goes outside the house and her town to confront it, bringing in fears that are otherwise contained within such spaces: likewise, in my poem, the self is split, 'coming' and 'going' between the constrained space of the 'tiny island' and another space, associated with 'a self hundreds of thousands of miles away'. As with Burak's 'vodka' and 'dreams', the material and immaterial blur: the speaker describes watching sound waves, invisible in life, as if they were the physical waves that surrounded the island, in a kind of anxious synaesthesia. While alluding to constriction, gendered exclusion, and spatial dislocation, this synaesthesia also suggests a special knowledge and a capacity to reinvent existing cultural practices within the space of the poem. Building on this, in another poem I wrote: 'I come here to reinvent your dances/ Your exaggerated moves/ your terrible way of things / our days that won't end'.³⁴⁴ In the first lines quoted, the first person speaker is again juxtaposed to a second person with whom they are in some kind of tension or conflict; in the final line, the two are united in 'our days that won't end'. This temporal endlessness is here a condition of hopeless extension, but I also use the extension and flexibility of space and time to suggest the imaginative possibilities of alternative worlds, alternative topographies and cultural narratives. Elsewhere, I have picked up on Burak's use of references to popular culture: 'somewhere in a galaxy far far away' is a phrase I have borrowed from the

³⁴³ Okulu, *Master Island*. p.142.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

Hollywood *Star Wars* franchise. This line is intended to bring out the sense of alienation in the text: the narrator is ultimately an alien to “Master Island” and its surroundings, but the residents of the island also see her as an alien. At the same time, the reference is humorous: alienation and the outer space alien of popular culture suggest tongue-in-cheek narratives of heroism, adventure, and the victory of good over evil which provide a contrast to ‘days that won’t end’.³⁴⁵ The alienation of the narrator of *Master Island* is similar to the alienation Burak’s characters experience, but like Burak and Bachmann, this alienation also suggests the importance of a defiant pose. This is associated with clothing, with ‘reinvent[ing] your dances’, with cultural subversion, defiance and survival: ‘After a day of ruins/ I want to dress sharp and have a memory/ more resilient’.³⁴⁶

From Etel Adnan I have learned to really look at my surroundings, to observe and appreciate the natural while also being aware of the sociopolitical histories that surround concepts of the natural. Coming from environments that are similarly surrounded by the sea and the sun, I feel drawn to Adnan’s poetry and I feel a strong connection with her work. Her book *The Arab Apocalypse* was an important discovery for me. In the beginning of the sequence “Master Island”, I wrote: ‘When the sun makes you go mad and/ drunk with all of its colours’.³⁴⁷ This line is a reference to the many colours of the sun in Adnan’s *The Arab Apocalypse*: ‘A yellow sun A green sun a yellow sun A red sun a blue sun’.³⁴⁸ This sun, bright and omnipresent, is different to the sun in Western Europe as experienced in the United Kingdom or as found in the Germanic territories of Bachmann’s work. Adnan feels

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.7

conflicted by its constant presence and its violence, and I share this conflicted sense. Adnan writes: ‘a tattooed sun eats the hand that helps it to rise’.³⁴⁹ The tyranny of the sun can also be seen in *Master Island*: ‘against the raging regime of the sun/ I did it to overcome fear/ I did it to rest my skin/ but I had to know I had to know’.³⁵⁰ Later I return to the sun in “Poem for the Sun”, which is dedicated to Adnan: ‘The sun is our lover but also / Our enemy /.... / The sun is the exile and the exile/ Is The sun’.³⁵¹ The image of the sun, borrowed from Adnan, recurs throughout *Master Island*. In the poem “Until Further Notice” I write: ‘Widen like the range of our sun, / A voice sunk in breath. / [...] 1. Learn not to take the sun up against’.³⁵² Andrew Durbin writes: ‘Adnan began to develop a highly symbolic poetics that represented anticolonial struggles in the Middle East with cosmic imagery, especially the sun and moon.’³⁵³ What I am doing with my sun imagery is similar. Due to the climate in which I grew up in İzmir, the sun has been a constant companion to me, like a friend. However, like Adnan’s, my sun is also not innocent: it symbolizes the imperial power imposed by the state: ‘The sun is our lover but also/ Our enemy’.³⁵⁴

I have also been influenced by the sense of urgency in Adnan’s poetics. The poems in *The Arab Apocalypse*, in particular, have a certain movement that keeps accelerating and moving forward due to the contemporary political events taking place. This movement comes up against the need to pause from such acceleration, to register and witness the damage surrounding one, whether or not one has directly experienced it oneself. Joan Retallack writes: ‘*The Arab Apocalypse* enacts a visceral need for

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.160.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Durbin, ‘Lessons of Engagement’

³⁵⁴ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.186.

witness, protest, lament, rage as woman, global citizen, poet, visual artist.’ She also addresses the non-verbal aspects of the text: ‘The marks – ornamental and scarring – register linguistically inexpressible emotion, multiply the semiotic import of ancient landscapes (textual, earthen) with eternally desecrated horizons.’³⁵⁵ Adnan’s use of “STOP” throughout the book, as mentioned earlier in the thesis, plays an important part in the text, emphasizing the need for alertness experienced by the narrator. She writes: ‘savage is the enemy who settles in their eyes STOP O sorrow!’³⁵⁶ In *Master Island* too there is an urgency and need to stay ready and quick: ‘S.O.S now S.O.S / Only some eaten paper / Will cross this demonology’.³⁵⁷ Adnan’s ‘STOP’, associated with telegrams and news reporting, echoes in my use of the radio danger signal ‘S.O.S.’, the sense of danger further hinted at in the figure of ‘eaten paper’, which suggest both the eating of secret messages in order to conceal them from enemy authorities and a kind of ritual against quasi-supernatural forces (‘this demonology’). Adnan’s poem contains textual references to earthly catastrophes, such as “the deluge”, which the narrator is warning the reader about: ‘OUT OUT of TIME there is spring’s shattered hope / In the deluge on our plains there are no rains but stones.’³⁵⁸ While this obviously glances back to the floods in *Gilgamesh* and the Bible, *Master Island* similarly warns its reader about the possible upcoming climate catastrophes: ‘they have come from many accidents / reckless / to find deluge in meaning / All the impatience the flights / yet everything is unmoving’.³⁵⁹ The sense of land and sea as caught between stasis and movement, suggested in my use of the figure of earthquakes, discussed earlier in this conclusion, repeats here: meaning is a

³⁵⁵ Joan Retallack, *Enjambement and Etel Adnan* (2020) <<https://www.frieze.com/article/enjambement-and-etel-adnan>> [accessed 16 October 2020].

³⁵⁶ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.57.

³⁵⁷ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.160.

³⁵⁸ Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, p.55.

³⁵⁹ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.155.

‘deluge’ which might sweep ‘them’ away, an ‘impatience’ that might lead to ‘accidents’ and cause ‘recklessness’, akin to the forward momentum against which Adnan cries ‘STOP’. At the same time, Adnan’s ‘deluge’ suggests a wasted potential—this deluge is not the rain required for growth—and likewise, my potential deluge, associated with a sense of reckless impatience and flight, comes up against the fact that ‘everything is unmoving’.

I have also been interested in the fact that both Adnan and I write in a foreign language. I mentioned her essay “To Write In a Foreign Language” in the chapter focusing on her work. This bilingualism I share with Adnan, as a poet who writes in English and lives in England: ‘Besides today I’m writing all the words that I was trying to / escape. In a different language. In a different space.’³⁶⁰ Like her, I also write in my native language, which is Turkish, and I sometimes use translations of my own work in one language to insert into the other. As noted earlier, Adnan wrote *The Arab Apocalypse* in French, which is the main language she grew up speaking, and translated it into English herself. As a result, she considers it as an original work written in English. I have also published poetry and essays in Turkish literary magazines, similar to Adnan who, more regularly, contributes to Arabic literary magazines. She still feels deeply connected to her original culture and language. As she said before starting to paint: ‘I no longer needed to write in French, I was going to paint in Arabic.’³⁶¹ This living between cultures and countries also has another aspect. Silvia Naef wrote: ‘The far-away wars in Iraq affected her again, as she tells it: “Being in California, I felt I was two people, because I was like all the Americans, the same as my friends. But I had a problem they didn’t have: I was worried about

³⁶⁰ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.136.

³⁶¹ Adnan, ‘To Write In a Foreign Language’, p.253.

Iraq, and they were not worried to the same degree.’”³⁶² Living in two countries and two cultures significantly affected my work. It offered me two different angles of view. However, at times it made me lonely as I’ve found it difficult to encounter people with whom I can talk about my country, and in particular, its literary traditions.

Whether critiquing the male violence behind Fascism and Nazism (Bachmann), ethnic conflict and imperialism (Adnan), or gender roles and the car industry (Burak), all three poets ultimately create a different space in their work, a utopian landscape for themselves. The critic Nurdan Gürbilek wrote in her latest book, *İkinci Hayat (The Second Life)*: ‘Writers do not only tell of a place, they always recreate it.’³⁶³ As mentioned earlier, the work of the poets in this thesis is strongly attached to the landscape they are (or were) a resident of, although, in the end their work creates a landscape of its own, an imaginary landscape, as it does not quite belong anywhere. In *Master Island*, I write: ‘Who talks outside their dreams / Always invisible elsewhere’.³⁶⁴ I have used a similar approach in the writing of *Master Island*, combining my experience of living and writing in two different languages and cultures with my interest in poetic form and experimental narrative. I have looked at Bachmann (*Darkness Spoken*), Adnan (*The Arab Apocalypse*), and Burak (*African Dance, Burnt Palaces, Everest My Lord, Ford Mach I*) for the use of cultural narratives and alternative topography in their works and have allowed this to influence my own writing.

³⁶² Silvia Naef, ‘“Painting in Arabic”: Etel Adnan and the Invention of a New Language’. *Manazir Journal*, 1, (2019), pp.19-29.

³⁶³ Nurdan Gürbilek, *İkinci Hayat - Kaçmak, Kovulmak Dönmek Üzerine Denemeler*, 3 edn (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2020), p.11.

³⁶⁴ Okulu, *Master Island*, p.188.

MASTER ISLAND

***GİZEM
OKULU***

run

run from your owner!

run

run

Night Poems (133)

Exit Point on Earth (138)

Master Island (146)

Counter Dance (165)

Night Poems

*You place yourself into this room... You form impossible directions to your body...
You run away from the languages surrounding you... You hear the voices when they
speak... You would reply to them with warmth, smiling...
When you come their water marks our knees... A fast cut that lingers and parts the
landscape... We walk among the Silence... The indifferent rain... Of what is to
come...*

*You and I... We talked about the endless summers... The possibilities of fleeing from
the Sun...*

I.

Night. In a country in the north. Neither too hot nor too cold. *I found myself a new language-* Behind the three walls all brown with dust of the earth. Horrible dreams and more to come. Projected in a room. Minute-hands and scorpions. Where that is the ultimate winner at all times. Where no matter how much the truth is reflected the reflection does not show much. I'm writing these now on a very curious desk with books king-size cigarettes under the smoke and with the smell of old furniture the memories of other people are easily erased from this room. I do not want to go back I leave everything. I do not want to go back I leave everything to that country of hills because I wake and see this systematic loneliness that they slowly created, this deadly smoke slowly, and this fog fog fog... In a city surrounded by its own domes planes find their way using telepathic coordination. But where am I going. Where am I going. I'm travelling in my grey nightdress. In my red veil. But where am I going. On my head a harpsichord. A harpsichord. When I sing a lullaby on double-decker busses, jumping from one train to another. When I smell that perfume my mother wore for years, where am I going. Night. In a country in the north. All scars close except *that* one.

II.

But how nice all of these... The choir of exhausted voices... To read fortunes from mystical foreheads... Besides today I'm writing all the words that I was trying to escape. In a different language. In a different space. That *instructive voice in exile* I wake up with will one morning find itself informing every authority. Because from now on fear is banned. To resist silence, its restlessness that is slowly shutting you is banned. To re-inhabit yourself is banned. And this feeling of emergency is nothing but an extension of my anger by imagination. Because when all these walls are destroyed maybe we will see the sun for the first time in centuries. A cathartic woman will come by dancing to the heart of the city. That lonely heart. Until they catch us barefoot. Shhhhhhhh. There is no more silence. No more games. No more scams. I say no more no more. Because here we do not accept simple explanations. Because here we are the A and we are the Z. We are the ones who glean our shadows in the land of destruction, then displaced thousands of times, trying to collect the pieces in a blue circle. There are mysterious things happening in this geography, you probably know by now.

Never mind, master,
We will come back later...

One day I will return in my decadent clothes.

III.

The rains
were raining

The rains
were raining

The rains
were raining

As if forever,

When we were passing all the rivers...

Exit Point on Earth

*No, it's not natural at all
to awake into this text
filled with space in every corner –
the golden space
where everything is seen
through the eyes of separation.*

I begin with altering,
everything.

I seize,
I occupy the floors
end of my ways unnecessarily still
to speak as you do to find an alternative
exit point
back on this earth

I wake up blood and thirsty sugar plum. There
are forces I'm not sure I can handle. All
so loyal, would not break in this posture
holding you too dense I think it's an act.

(We call it "song" for there are no words
here)

For the cutting of paper with no job
no necessity you come in when you
want to, pretending to be discreet yet
there is something else
something else

After a day of ruins
I want to dress sharp and have a memory
more resilient

I'm like this towards the winds
I'm like this coming – going
sitting on a tiny island
drinking a tiny cup of whiskey
in a self hundreds of thousands of miles away
watching the echo of the sound waves

I'd have given up
interrupting sentences
become indifferent
having thrown away
every thing
for cheap life
so beautiful

But I cannot accept this, I said
We can't risk another interruption
triggered by the same smoke,
events that emptied houses
barricades, you say

On the roofs of islands,
we try harder for what
can be represented –
the promise of their sun,
our lack of desire for things,
words that are breaking me
in the morning –
I've tried to keep them
from falling

Here the work is not complete and its future is
unattainable on earth. It knows every growing
fracture of your room, your endless counting at
nights; the plan, you have made it yours, in each
procrastination, by persisting on the importance of space
on the importance of symbols that haunt you,
that part you, perfectly
into their small calculations
so you go back to your rebel zone
spinning
 silently.

I'm sharpening
my words
in all the right rooms
I can get in

Forever, anticipating
what the center
can hold
what imagery costs

running
not belonging to anyone
I get up with them

Master Island

*An ancient fairy tale
from straits faaaar away
nothing unusual
An ancient fairy tale
where time is missing
and where only memories are living
in a glorious city
with your highest monuments
men
jobs
and children
and with your expectations
ruins out of sight
and with my expectations
slow and ever sloooower
slowing down
that indifference
which draws me towards myself*

When the sun makes you go mad and
drunk with all of its colours

In waters and sea drunk
We arrive in The battlefield
Ready to settle

In here, Master Island, we have made surfaces for leaving things
and overcome prolonging fears.

“In Master Island
 everything grows
in spite of itself
 feelings disarm
lessons learned
 time for reckless
reckless teeth”

There's no secrecy here
there's no gate growing

In this island we all hate
Some of us more than others
In drunken nights together

That manic melody in my head
I go with
under the zinc rain

Today there is no more sleep in my city
there is no sound

I am changing
the heat the temperature
of things to come

& it is already
inside

it needs no
supervision

But all my enemies are dead

I have no balance

can you see, can you really see
my shortsighted reader

we carve letters
instructions on the floor
now thousands of words
are manufactured to be triggered

spitting particles of air
frosty silver air
thousands of voices

I come here to reinvent your dances
Your exaggerated moves
your terrible way of things
our days that won't end

Our disturbance is not the sky but the familiar.
our earth is dust and rusty metal fools
our earth is shattered by the prospect of earthquakes
& its wind spins you, silently

this is an eclipse in nowhere
now rush autonomy channel
vertigo of finite lines

we'd displace ourselves anywhere &
zigzag our way into
the shapelessness of trees

what remains is
the hand

blinded by the
symptoms of
the look

= the destruction of things

My anger is My anger is My anger is My win

Who navigates us
to the underground world?

I'd wish to leave no traces in archives
I start when there is no longer an event,
a prepared absence of things,
to construct texts, mediums
the same as the last
I rush from one night into another
where no daylight reaches
where I am willing too here

I want the sky grinding with no rhythmic
Responsibility

For I crawl out –
Out of my place
I do not seek
Solitude I work
Fast as Mach fast
In the motionless air

Because I needed something prophetic
to cover up this piece of
paper I hold

they have come from many accidents
reckless
to find deluge in meaning
All the impatience the flights
yet everything is unmoving

*RNA, the messenger of
everything
come back!*

Because what we don't see
we want
what we don't hear
we need

Sometimes letters
are to be read
with dread

Becoming another colour among seven
in crystal-trace incarcerated,
walking hands-in-pocket
raises some suspicion,

Fear this must be
Fear he too shall incarcerate me

“Crystal-trace,
Crystal-trace,
Eyes baby-blue
Waiting for dissolution

Crystal-trace
a crystal skull
a brain made out of wigs
and his catatonic looks”

Today, everybody is transmigrating
Today, everybody is far away
And nobody cares about the radio

And what about those
left behind
women of deluge?

Expecting, in a land missing time,
To recover what is lost.

Master island
stands still

its sun does not burn your face
but you still wonder
wishing for a leaking city

S.O.S. now S.O.S.
Only some eaten paper
Will cross this demonology

I will float some endless sea with no shelter
live trackless under precision
there is no magical geometry here
only space to fully breathe in

you have seen this before you know it

against the raging regime of the sun
I did it to overcome fear
I did it to rest my skin
but I had to know I had to know

I'm hoping to be trackless enough to see.

Once I blew up the entire universe with my cheap lighter
What would be left
If I disorganized every thing
All my words in your patterns of speech
Shut out the wild silence

& this is what I saw
been travelling the sea
for so many years
after I promised that I won't live under your false
pretenses

I found myself flying
And with my skirt above
Your bridges, really fast
I was ready

I will take what I take from you and leave you to age
sitting there all rusty when today's sun comes up

No I don't want your rain songs
to become the cosmos

In the constant repetition
Now changing our words
We remove our steps
But we did not come here for that.

Those big bandits
Slow the movement
Of jaws

Somewhere in a galaxy far, far away
A women undresses herself from her polemics
To the elegy of the slowest
moments
To the difference between hatred
and disconcern

Ready-set-go

“Ah, you are a *wild* one
Speaking such terms”

Your houses are not safe
when I am feeling most explosive
waiting to step out of your game

then I am building my mouth through damage.

Counter Dance

Who gives you studies in light
To be more than sound

The moon keeps changing
Where the horizon is

An occupied sky
A pile of imposters

Until Further Notice

Forget the world that you are used to
tell the captain I'm gone
there is secrecy in meaning and emancipation in this case
talking about the year we lost on phantom fields
a secret shredding underneath the desk
this is the country we pay our lives into
numbers that are worth everything and everything I shall remake
explain my horrors to myself
to burn out with pleasure
sweet-talk only if you let it go

We'll give each other ghostly introductions –
revolutionaries as comets within the walls of
establishment, widen like the range of our sun
a voice sunk in breath

Useless in nostalgia I recall you
time outlined as carnival of waste
every thing should be kept hidden
requirements of a job well done
if worked at all

1. Learn not to take the sun up against
2. The entry of songs
3. Unfamiliar patches of grass
4. Each expectation entangled

My heart traces outlaws
a desert full of sky
I crawl home
I fall on my strange vision

To finally accumulate one's own desert
in the rain bed of the country
where words arrive, wrapped
marking new wounds
a solitary room for growing emotions

Words sudden in breath
float up to the surface of
the poem

I leap on to your hands
wear them
as mine

Why don't you go now, forget
I'll plant signs
symbols in your ears

Unprecedented dreams
through our closed fists

Impossibility,
you ruin yourself to the flags

Don't stop it's the desert

This chance

we're onto something

bigger

Not wanting to repeat the past

but to trace

what's happening today

“I’ve filled every hole

In this city

And made exile

Impossible”

- A construction worker

To Wait For

When I am the radio muting all emotions sacrificial

When I become a thief hunting zits on interrupted cheeks

When I take conformity as a serious business

My spy gadget

My chloroform

When I set all targets on fire

When I leave you in moonlight
When I explode the moon
When the machinery crush
The ultimatum of feelings
When all my desires
Are arithmetic desires

When I reproduce the old ghosts
When I glitter and want out
When I find my clothes rat licked
When I shoot and you miss
When I bleed a wild sore
When something inconvenient happens
When I conquer the fire

Oh this

Oh that

Do you know the lead to my cities
always more incomplete,
always

to shake the dirt off your feet

I'd thought you'd be leaving. Again and again. For the cobalt skies. Headless
expectant. Are you made of impositions of lies.
In barbaric towns they seek you.

What causes this violence is mirroring you

I descend in and out of time.
My body breaks in new lands, takes
its form

It is the gaps in your history,
waiting for you to re-enact
your part

Poem For The Recreation Of My Youth

When you're young and live under another sky
do not think of a word to remember.
They will form islands and stretch
through volcanic touch
crossed out sensitivity, like a strange distant light.

Something is missing.
Among anemones,
in shame.
Something dark in this flatness of weather,
to draw yourself once again
from an oval mirror,
you reunite with your own resources.

Now I live in my own madrigal,
smoke all over it and I may stand
millions of years.

Poem For A Song

This is your dark history
Come seal it now &
Place it around your neck
With an imaginary sentiment

This is your cloudy nest
Come protect it now &
Dance among the cloud layers
As when remembering a dream

This is your vulgar song
Come sing it now &
Know there's no bottom to the lake
The feathers are unfolding

Counter Dance

I'll walk from the other side of the road

You'll give me a scout salute

I'll tailor myself in drawn clothes

You'll burn me with the first number

I'll moan you of hearts

You'll dance to the furthest creatures

I'll wear a fedora on my head

And never come back

(Ah, the corner of my eye

And so suddenly!)

Or What Is Here Is What Is Present

And you are not at home
And it is a spatial disaster
And the special effects from the radio
And it seems to me patrolling around
Your not being at home
And not orbiting
And in the end isn't it all about
Finding the equation line
Between one's duties to life
And sacrifice
Sirius, abate!
There is a duello somewhere
Above your high window
A finger in a painting
Points to that

Neon Tetra

In the dream I drive through a message:
The colours of my childhood, the miniature sun
Once again reminding me that
Everything can go away, but
Every night the story of the blue
And red fish will be
Immortal

This, horizontal escape
Black sun of self
Brushed out with clean strokes
Always under the weather
Always under its distant rage.

Poem For The Sun

for Etel Adnan

The sun is our lover but also
Our enemy

Emerging from the streets
Reaching a new way of life
Consistent and demanding
So that you never feel lonely

So that your arms would puzzle
Their uncensored version
Creeping and sneaking and
Not wanting to be seen
Starry eyed for another love
Of the market industry

(Bleach their memory
Wash it in the sink)

The sun is the exile and the exile
Is The sun

Exit strategy for histories
From yours truly
A decoding of a language of
No one
Only a galaxy of viciously ugly
Wanting everything that is
Nothing
Wanting everything that is
Nothing

Travelling on this sphere
With the radioactive vision
Of the travel sensitive

The sun it's
The sun The sun –

I can no longer

Who talks outside their dreams

Always invisible elsewhere

If you pinch us we will scream.

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